

THE PENGUIN
NEW WRITING

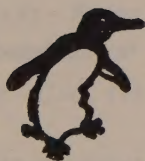
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THE PENGUIN NEW WRITING

Edited by
JOHN LEHMANN

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¹ *Specially written for this issue of Penguin New Writing*

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About the new contributors

SAUL BELLOW was born in Lachine, Quebec Province, but has spent most of his life in Chicago. He studied at Chicago University and also at Northwestern and Wisconsin, and he has been a teacher of anthropology. He has contributed stories and reviews to leading American periodicals, and has written two novels, *Dangling Man* and *The Victim*, both of which have been published in England.

MARGARET GARDINER was educated at Bedales and Newnham College, has taught in elementary schools and was secretary of an anti-fascist organization before the war. During the war years, she wrote short stories, and two years ago she began to write poems.

RUPERT CROFT-COOKE has travelled in 36 countries and written about them in many novels and other books. He has lived with gypsies, 'tented' with a circus and had many adventures in India, South America and South Africa. His latest published works include a monograph on Rudyard Kipling in the English Novelists Series, and a novel *Wilkie* about post-war England.

EDWARD BOLTON is twenty-five years old. He was educated at Winchester and King's College, Cambridge, and he has since worked with a publisher in the industrial Midlands and North.

DAVID HIGHAM was born in London in 1895. He has written several plays, including *Mutiny* performed for the twenty-first birthday of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in 1934 and at the Malvern Festival of that year. He has translated several Mozart operas and has written the libretto of a new opera, with music by John Frost.

Foreword

There is a general belief, that has found wide acceptance for many generations, that if a man has the true instincts and equipment of a writer, he will sooner or later win through to recognition, however great the obstacles that confront him at the beginning of his career, however deep the indifference he meets with from publishers, editors and critics.

From a philosophical point of view, there is much to be said for this belief. Literary history is full of the examples of men with an obsessive determination to make their names as writers, whose will-power and energy have finally triumphed – and, often, have changed the taste of their time in so doing. And yet, on further reflection, two doubts present themselves to modify this heroic view of literature. Not all the books that have survived the wastage of time are the products of such unwavering concentration of force; some of the best-loved seem, rather, to be fortunate accidents, or the overflow of leisure and approbation, in careers of entirely different emphasis. Can we be sure that these works would have appeared at all if the way had not already been smoothed for them by the main success? – can we even think it likely? Again, we hear only of those who *have* won through: what of those who may have had the same energy and passionate hope, but failed? How can we in most cases even know of their existence? Here surely, in another form, is the old fallacy that everything in history had to be, simply because it happened.

Even when writers have made their name, but have died young, we cannot be certain that the qualities which originally attracted the notice of their enthusiasts would have remained characteristic of them. Keats and Shelley,

repudiating their early work as immature in feeling and technique, might, if they had lived, have risen to the heights of Shakespeare and Milton; as it is, their early deaths created, one might maintain, a kind of fixation of admiration for the adolescence of emotion and thought which they were just outgrowing.

In this number, we publish one of the posthumous stories by Denton Welch, whose recent death was perhaps the greatest loss that the future of our literature has suffered since the deaths of Alun Lewis and Sidney Keyes. Denton Welch was lucky in finding the success he needed to develop his great gifts with the publication of his first book; but unlucky in meeting with an accident that not only eventually killed him but kept his experience within certain narrow limits. The danger in his case is that an often repeated pattern underlying his stories should come to be considered as his essential territory and contribution; let us remember, rather, the astonishing feeling for words, the incredibly sensitive response to atmosphere, the rapidly growing subtlety of characterisation which, under other circumstances, with normal opportunities, might have brought within his power a range of achievement as great and as diverse as any mature master of this century.

JOHN LEHMANN

Edith Sitwell

MEDUSA'S LOVE SONG

It was the time when the Day cried to me 'Show me your
heart, Medusa -
That I may be changed into stone
And no more bear the grief of the all-seeing Sun.

Ah, stare with your eyes that are lidless as mine, are sleep-
less,

At the place where my heart was! Change to immutable
stone

The small equalities, reigned over, now, by the swift-winged
Scarlet Dust, brother of the three Furies, Tisiphone and
Allecto,

Megaera, seeing all in its equilibrium:

The temperature of the royal vein, the basilica, soon to be
changed into porphyry,

(From this grew the empery of the rose), and the tidal move-
ments, the curvature

Of space and the hump of the cripple; the blood's fever-
microbe

And the criminal, microbe of the world's fevers.

Medusa, pity the Day

Who stares at the streets of the cities, the griefs and humilia-
tions

Of those who hourly die from the heart's necrosis;

The children fleshless as Adam in his first grave of the world;
the moment of Man's last innocence

Before the Decision; the pigs and the foolish asses
(The straying, the weak), who are crucified through the
heart

In the place of lions, in the cities, crying for tears of a lost
world.

To quench their thirst, red as the Dust; but for answer have
only

The summer of the world's fevers, the sound of the laughter
Of the idiot Emperor, killing the winged one, the Fly.
Have pity on these, Medusa.

O you to whom love too has given the life eternal, respite-
less,

The crucifixion of the heart on the Light all-seeing!
But I replied not. My eyes that are sleepless and lidless
As Day's, see one sight alone!

For once it was spring. And I with the other amaryllideous
girls of burning

Gold, walked under the boughs and listened to the sweet
chattering

Procne ... And love began in the heart like the first wild
spark in the almond

Tree. But the heart of the spring has been burned away!

And Night descends like a fire. For this is the time of the
dogdom, the dryness,

The reign of the only other winged one, Musca, the Fly.
And the kingly vermilion Dust, the brother of the Erinnyes,
Lies on my breast, for he is my only lover,
Lies on my lips, the planet-struck, the song-struck,
Lies on my heart that yet beneath the plague of Love is
shining

And not obscured by beams of the great Sun.

Though crucified on the Light and Song, I yet am wingèd.
Ah, think not to escape me!

No more shall you escape me than the Sun
His heaven! I am blackened by my fires like the nights of the
great Spring,
Yet am wingèd like the nightingale, like the Erinnyes,
I, the spring night that lies on your breast like fire, the day
that enfolds you,
The fire that springs up in your tears!

In the nights of spring I will clothe you with fire like the
nightingale!
In your veins I will run like the blood that is fire and is Fate,
the blind impulse,
Predestination and Doom, crying to sins old as the Spring!

Why, lovely swallow, weary me with thy sweet chattering?
What dost thou hope to find in my heart? The warmth
of the Spring?
In the great azure are flaming the almond bough and the
almandine flower of the clear rose,
And my heart sheds its fire.

For once it was Spring. But now there is neither honey nor
bee for me –
Neither the sting nor the sweetness! –
Not mine the warm heart of Aprils and apricots, apricus,
Sunny, all gold within like the heart of the honeycomb:
Neither the honey-winged swarms of the gold thoughts of
summer
Shall be mine again.

NOTES:

Verse 4 – Leon Bloy writes of pigs and asses crucified in the place of lions.

Verse 9, line 1 – 'It clothes me with a shirt of fire.' Hagop Boghossian in a poem *The Nightingale*, quoted by Marianne Moore: 'Marriage'.

Verse 11, line 1 – Sappho.

Verse 12 – 'nor honey nor bee for me.' Sappho.

Denton Welch

THE VISIT

When I'd come to the last word on the last page, I felt I had to write to him at once. There seemed an urgency about the business which I did not stop to question. I sat down at my little desk in the window and there, surrounded with leaves and the sound of the birds in the garden, began my foolish letter. I say foolish, because even as I wrote, I knew I was extravagant, strained, curiously false in the words I chose to express my gratitude and enthusiasm.

What would an author think at receiving such a letter from an unknown woman? It was quite clear to me that he would probably be contemptuously amused, a little exasperated; but there would be some pleasure in receiving such tribute, and who was I to guard my dignity and deny him the only repayment I could make? I licked the envelope, pressed it down and went out to the letter-box before I could change my mind.

As I walked back down the lane, through the evening air, I felt released, as though I had got rid of something, drink or waste food, that was burdening my body. It seemed the most wonderful thing in the world to give out all the time, things that were not wanted, expressions that no one would bother and understand, smiles they could not see, and songs they'd never hear. I went into my little kitchen and started to heat some coffee and boil an egg for my supper.

The answer came in five days' time. If he were to write at all, I had been prepared to wait, since the publisher would have first to forward my own letter. Then there might be other delays. He might be travelling or living abroad. This promptness therefore both delighted and nonplussed me. I had to steel myself for a meeting earlier than I had imagined

it to myself; but I had asked for it; and now he invited me to tea on the Friday, only three days away. I began rather agitatedly to plan what I should wear. Going up to my room, I opened the cupboard doors and looked at all my clothes, hanging patiently, like so many squashed flat criminals. They were nice clothes, but I had grown a little too used to them. In the end I decided on a trim coat and skirt, a little severe for me, but becoming. With this I should wear a stiff, frilly white shirt with my one and only valuable brooch, my father's regimental badge in tiny diamonds. I was aware of the rather painful gentility of such a choice. I did not really wish to present myself as nothing but a dreary English gentlewoman, but the memory of my letter returned to disquiet me. I was determined to underline the sobriety in my character in an attempt to neutralize some of the letter's excessiveness.

He wrote from a village some thirty miles away in the next county, but the journey did not sound difficult. He gave me the name of the station, the time of the train and said that his friend, Tom Parkinson, would be there to meet me in the car. Somehow all this care and solicitude struck a slight chill into me. I felt that he must often and often have arranged for strangers to visit him. It was as if he made a business of never denying himself to anyone, because he so despised the pomposity of ambitious little people who tried to add to their importance by a lack of all response. Then the thought came to comfort me that he might still be genuinely pleased to see people who had enjoyed his book; for, although it had been out for a year or more, it was his first book and he could not yet be so very celebrated. I had never heard his name mentioned, only read it in one or two reviews.

Tom Parkinson was there to meet me. I knew him by his searching, rather anxious eyes. They were not the eyes of a man about to welcome wife, sweetheart or friend; they were too guarded, too ready to save the stranger from embarrassment. I liked at once his beaky nose, his tallness

which was yet not overwhelming, the hank of dingy fairish hair flopping over his forehead. The sleeves of his open-neck shirt were rolled up and his beltless trousers seemed to hang on his hips rather precariously; they were slack round his ankles as if they dragged on the ground behind. I knew just what the hems would be like at his heels – caked with mud and beginning to fray.

When we shook hands, I saw that he had tiny red veins under the tight brown skin on the sides of his arched nose; they were not in the least unpleasing, and the nondescript colour of his eyes soothed me. I guessed that we were almost exactly of an age, but I hoped, rather pointlessly, that he was the elder by a year or so.

He took me out to the dilapidated Morris and we started to climb the hill into the town. It was a squalid little country place, only called into being, I should imagine, by the building of the station in the middle of the last century. The one or two older buildings looked as if they had once been solitary farm-houses.

Soon we were out of the one main street and climbing another hill through frothy orchards and bare hop-gardens. The contrast between excess of blossom, thick and heavy as curdled milk, and the naked poles linked to each other by lines of tingling wire, sent some sharp feeling through me. It was as if a Rubens woman, rich in the glow of her fatness and beauty, were stripped the next moment of all her flesh, so that one had nothing but the gaunt skeleton, almost heard the little bones of hand and foot tinkling.

We came at last to a narrow lane down which Tom Parkinson turned the car. It was hardly more than a track and we bounced in our seats as the wheels mounted the ruts or sank into them again. I tried to prepare my face, to wash self-consciousness and strain right out of it. I longed to look in my mirror, but somehow, with Tom Parkinson so close beside me, the gesture seemed too calculating, too business-like. Might not his straightforward nature jump to the conclusion that my titivating was due entirely to an imbecile

wish to fascinate his friend in the first moment of our meeting? I contented myself by opening my bag and fiddling about until I had the mirror out of its pocket and could just see my nose and lips shining up from the dark interior. I bent my head a little and saw my eyes. They did not reassure me. They looked steady and hard and fierce, as frightened eyes are apt to do. I simpered at myself, then smiled genuinely to remember my mother doing this when I was a child. I had thought her so utterly ridiculous.

We were slowing down. I looked up to see a converted stone farm building over the hedge on the right. The part which had once housed carts and rakes was now glazed in. The three great windows with their thick white bars gave the place an attractive air of comfort, even of luxury. There were no ugly creosoted beams, no leaded casements or quaint 'lanthorns' on either side of the door, just the white paint and the rough silvery stone walls. At one end the building rose to two stories. I guessed this must once have been the stable and loft. The long loft door, with a little projecting roof over it and the wheel for a pulley, was now also glazed.

Tom took me in and I saw how bare the large ground-floor room was. It was not as I would have had it at all, but in spite of this, or perhaps just because of it, I liked it and felt soothed. On the tiled floor was thick satiny rush matting in a pattern of squares bound together. The walls seemed to be the natural oatmeal colour of undistempred plaster. Over the mantelpiece was a rich still-life of glowing fruit, peonies, dahlias, sunflowers and enormous shells; indeed everything was larger than in life. The heavy impasto was a little distasteful to me, and I found myself repeating the old phrase, 'Excrement on canvas'.

The puritan room was really rather a bore, but I found myself dwelling on it and almost appreciating it because it was so unalarming; and to be calmed at that moment was all that I craved for. Tom let me look about, not hurrying me in the least; then he called up the stairs:

‘Andrew, we’ve arrived.’

I heard an answering call, deep, rather musical, a little too social, as if the whole situation were ‘tremendous fun’. In spite of this slight false note, I was attracted to the voice; I knew that it was trying to make me feel at ease.

We climbed the polished oak stairs. Once I looked down on the long sober room. From this unusual viewpoint the large chairs with their red and white striped cushions and their loose covers of rough linen looked extraordinarily inviting. I had the childish longing to jump over the banisters and land in the middle of the broad sofa.

Tom opened the door on the narrow landing and said:

‘Here we are.’

I followed him in and felt myself holding out my hand dazedly to the little person on the bed. He was terribly deformed, his hands all twisted and his body seemingly telescoped into itself, so that he was broad but perhaps only three feet tall. He had a smooth oval face with rather delicate features. His hair was red and a little silky fringe ran right round to his jaw line, framing his face and making him look like a particularly well-groomed ill-disposed monkey. He wore no moustache, so I could watch his pink lips clearly. He licked them as his eyes lit up and he said:

‘I’m not IN bed, only ON it; I like best to loll here in my room. Don’t you like to be a little up in the air? How right they were when they made all town houses with their drawing-rooms on the first floor!’

I said: ‘Yes, it’s nicer to be off the ground, to be able to look out a little farther.’

Tom had brought a chair up for me and I sat down, placing my bag beside me, refusing to clutch it as I wished to do.

All this time Andrew – already I named him this in my mind – was watching me with his small bright eyes. They seemed to be brimming with expectation. I think he was waiting for me to betray some sign of horror, or pity for his condition; then, I felt the eyes would have bubbled over and he would have gloated. I wanted him to get no satisfaction

from me. I wanted this to be the most prosaic tea-party that had ever taken place. Already I angrily regretted giving in to impulse and writing that letter. I resented not being warned before I broke my way into this different world where nobody wanted me in particular. Why had I not been told of Andrew's condition? I found myself childishly blaming some mysterious, unknown being who should have told me everything beforehand.

Tom reappeared with the tea-tray and I felt easier. There were some very good rock cakes which he had made himself. As I ate and drank and talked, I was able to look about me in little snatches. Andrew's room was more gargoyle and frilly than the downstairs room. There was more to offend, surprise and interest. A great pile of exercise books and typescripts balanced, seemingly in absolute confusion, on a table near his bed. There was thick dust on some of them; it was clear that he would not have them touched.

Andrew did most of the talking, shooting out questions, telling gay little anecdotes, laughing, and swivelling those bubbling eyes of his. Tom sometimes murmured a word or smiled his lazy, rather private smile, which had something very slightly irritating about it. I suppose it kept one out. He seemed determined to enjoy his joke alone.

Andrew never mentioned books, and when I felt I ought to say something about this one which had so impressed me, he scowled, turned away and said:

'Let's not talk about anything so embarrassing.'

The evening wore on and still I made no move to go. I seemed to be fascinated, held in a house where there was no place for me. It was almost as if I were waiting for something to happen. A smell of cooking rose up the stairs, and instead of getting to my feet to say good-bye, I asked Andrew if I might go down to the kitchen to help Tom. He said:

'Oh, do. He'd love that.'

Then almost before I was out of the room, I caught a glimpse of him turning the pages of a book of old engravings

of the Seats of the Nobility and Gentry! My eyes had caught the title as I sat drinking my tea, and I too had wanted to look inside.

I knocked tentatively on the kitchen door. Tom came to it frowning a little, holding a frying-pan which was still sizzling from the electric hotplate.

'Can I help?' I asked, looking up at him anxiously. I wanted to be doing something to prove my usefulness, to clear away the impression that I was one of those people who stayed too long. I still don't know why I didn't leave politely at just the right moment after tea.

'Well, the kitchen is awfully small for two,' Tom was saying rather pointedly. It was clear that he wanted me out of the way; 'but if you like to lay the tray for three in that corner near the larder door, I think we won't be too much in each other's way.'

'I say, is it all right my staying to supper?' I asked in a rush.

'Oh, of course; we were expecting you to.'

Tom turned back to his frying and I set about laying the tray without more ado. I knew how irritating it was to be asked continually where things were kept, so I did my best without talking to Tom, searching in cupboards, pulling out plates and forks and knives until I had what we should need. I saw that we were to have fried fish and potatoes and some early lettuces. There didn't seem to be any fish knives and forks, so I put ordinary ones; then started to make a French dressing.

'I won't put it over the lettuce in case either of you doesn't like it,' I said.

'Oh, but we both do,' replied Tom rather absently, his mind still on the perfect browning of the potatoes.

I shredded the lettuce with my hands, tearing each leaf into small bits, then I poured on the dressing and tossed the fragments about till they were all covered and glistening slightly from the oil.

'I don't bother to do it nearly as well as that,' said Tom looking down at the bowl approvingly. I felt glad and hoped

that he would stop classing me as just another nuisance to be borne good-naturedly.

‘If you don’t have to be back to-night, why not sleep here?’ he said suddenly. ‘It would save me having to take the car out in the dark; the lights are rotten.’

‘But I haven’t got pyjamas or a tooth-brush or anything,’ I said, quite taken aback; ‘besides, what about Mr Clifton?’

‘Andrew? Oh, he wouldn’t mind; it’s no trouble to him. All we’ve got to do is to make up the bed.’

Matters were left like this, till we climbed up to Andrew’s room, Tom carrying the heavy tray of fish, potatoes and salad, I following with the coffee which was still dripping through the percolator.

When we had both sat down near Andrew’s bed, with the trays on stools before us, Tom suddenly said:

‘Oh, Susan Innes is staying the night; it’s much easier than getting the car out with those hopeless lights, and she hasn’t got to be back for anything. I’m letting her have my new tooth-brush; it’s still all done up in cellophane.’

Andrew turned to me with a metallic smile and said:

‘That’s fine; we won’t have to hurry at all then over the meal?’

‘But is it all right?’ I asked miserably. ‘What must you think of me coming to tea and then staying the night?’

‘It will be nice,’ Andrew said in his smooth bland way; ‘We so seldom have anyone to use our spare room.’

All through supper I felt strained. Andrew’s gaiety was brittle. His amusing maliciousness made me uneasy. What would he do with me when I had gone? He would tear me into little pieces, as I had torn the lettuce. I began to wish I had left hours ago. It is terrible to be with people who are intelligent and can understand, yet who cut themselves off with a high wall of indifference. It is far better to be with crude people who do not realize half the time what they are saying or doing. One is not so lonely or so lost.

The lack of contact between me and Andrew, even between me and Tom, made me long all the time to be doing

something for them, so that at least they would look back on me as a help in a practical way, a sort of temporary housekeeper who knew her business, even if she were good for nothing more.

'What can I do?' I asked as soon as supper was over. 'Can't I do some mending? I should like that; it soothes me.'

'Do you need soothing?' Andrew asked with his bright unwarmed smile.

'Don't we all?' I shot out, rather too fiercely. 'But seriously, I saw an enormous hole in the heel of Tom's sock – I may call you Tom, I hope? If you have any more like that, they ought to be done at once.'

Would they mistake my longing to be doing something for a cloying motherliness? Would they think it coy to use Tom's name, then to ask for permission? Perhaps the worst transgression in their eyes would be that I had had the impertinence to mention the hole in Tom's sock. I didn't care, I was past caring. I felt that I had floundered from the beginning and might just as well go on floundering. I was on the brink of that strange desperate wish to throw all defences down and appear utterly ridiculous in the eyes of the enemy.

'That's very good of you,' Tom was saying gravely. 'I have some socks that need doing, but there's not much wool. Will you mind using all the wrong colours?'

'Of course not,' I said; 'if you don't mind wearing the peculiar darns.'

He brought me some newly-washed socks and some skeins of what looked like embroidery wool. There was a brilliant magenta colour and some salmon pink. I started to work at once. The huge egg-shaped holes gaped at me, but I soon had some of them neatly criss-crossed with the bright wool. The darns looked strangely theatrical; they reminded me of the artistic patches on the Pied Piper's cloak, or on the breeches of a stage pedlar.

We spoke little as I worked. Andrew looked at his book of engravings and Tom puffed and sucked at his pipe. I

hated the juicy bubbling it sometimes made. Gradually the light faded in the room until at last I had to put down my needle. Andrew's book lay on his chest. He seemed to be staring up at the ceiling, or were his eyes shut? I wondered how it was that I could seem so domestic and settled with them and yet be so completely cut off.

'Would you like the light?' Tom asked thoughtfully, seeing me put down the sock and lean back.

'No, I'm sure you're tired of those old socks,' broke in Andrew; 'don't do any more. Let's just sit in the gloaming, or dusk, or whatever other cosy name you wish to give it.'

We sat in silence. I could just discern the little dumpy figure of Andrew on the bed. Somehow his richly striped dressing-gown, turned now to black and pale grey, made me think of a squat cold-cream jar, or a fat tube of toothpaste with the used part neatly rolled up. I pondered on his terrible deformity, guessing that he must have been born in that condition. I remembered the girl at school, so quick at lessons, so respected by all the other children, who had been born with just such a deformity – the normal-looking head, the twisted hands, the rigid little legs and thick body. Without realizing it at once, I began to endow Andrew with the qualities we all had given her. He was the brilliant person – 'brilliant' has a special, almost magical meaning for children and simple-minded people. He was wonderfully brave, fighting all the time, refusing to be beaten by his handicap. He had a loving nature and never complained. I even remembered to tell myself that his body did not matter; it was not the REAL person. The real person one day would be freed from his shackles.

It was some moments before I realized that all these blindly held beliefs about my school-fellows hardly fitted Andrew at all. They were all lies or deceitful half-truths. He was not 'brilliant', his book was mercifully free from that quality, and his conversation, though animated and amusing, was on a level with the conversation of a hundred other people I had known. It was almost as if he refused to

give the best of himself; he needed that for a more serious purpose. Perhaps he was brave in the way that we all are forced to be brave when faced with something inevitable. But I could not believe that he had a loving nature, or that he never complained. If his attitude to me as a stranger was any guide, he was certainly not very attached to his fellow beings. His affability was only on the surface; and I was sure that Tom often had to listen to long diatribes against people and circumstances.

The last and greatest lie was that his body did not matter. Of course it mattered, terribly, horribly. It was the thing that mattered most when one first met him, and, although I knew it would matter less as one came to know him more, indeed was already not quite so important to me, it would always be there to jolt one at unexpected moments, to keep him as a person apart, a special case.

I saw his head turned towards me now in the darkness. He seemed to be thinking about me for the first time since we'd met. I moved a little uneasily in my chair, making the wooden joints creak.

'I'm afraid you must find it dreadfully dull here,' he said at last.

I answered in the same vein of conventional politeness.

'It's not dull at all, it's very good of you to have me. I feel rather guilty about staying the night when I really only came to tea.'

Tom quietly got up from his chair and went out of the room, carrying one of the trays. I felt that I had been left to talk to Andrew alone. I was not grateful to Tom for his tact.

'It is rather wicked to play such a trick on you, to let you come here without any warning. Things must be so utterly different from what you expected.' Andrew spoke suddenly with a curious mixture of taunting and solicitude in his voice. I was completely nonplussed and could only repeat myself.

'It was very good of you to have me.' Then on a lower note I murmured, 'I see no trick. I asked myself.'

‘Yes, but what did you expect to find?’

‘What do you mean?’ I asked repressively, because I knew only too well. I have seldom been so grateful for darkness. He could see no expression. The red mounting to my cheeks was hidden from him. Only my voice could betray me. My determination to control it made every muscle tighten.

‘Oh, I see; you won’t play the truth game,’ he said amusingly. ‘Perhaps it’s just as well. It’s stimulating, but it’s also rather painful. The trouble is one remembers for too long afterwards.’

‘I can’t play any game, for I’m utterly at sea. I don’t know why I wrote to you, or why I came, or why I’m staying the night when I was only asked to tea.’

Andrew seemed to consider my outburst for a moment or two; then in a very gentle, almost a tender voice, he said: ‘Isn’t it strange, I can’t think why either.’

For an instant the rebuff hung in the air. It was an outrageous little sentence that had nothing to do with me; but when it flashed down to pierce me, I was so startled that I jumped to my feet.

‘I’d better go, I can’t stay here,’ I said. Rushes of mortification seemed to sweep over my words even as I spoke.

‘Oh, please don’t misunderstand me,’ Andrew implored. ‘I simply meant that it is often impossible to understand the reason for one’s own actions. How much more impossible to interpret the reasons of others.’

Is that what he had meant? Or was it a skilful side-stepping? Had my whole attitude during the visit been one of wrongheaded suspicion? Had I read far too much into harmless words and looks? I was too confused to think anything out. I only wanted to be alone. Without saying anything more I moved towards the landing. Andrew was too careful to say good night, in case I should be coming back. The slippery stairs and the cool, polished rail were soothing to me. I felt the uninhabited quality of the living-room rising up to bathe me round with its peace. There was a light from the kitchen. Tom was there filling a hot-water bottle.

'I've just thrown your bed together. This is to put in it, although I think it's pretty well aired already.'

He held the bottle out to me and I took it gratefully. It seemed a symbol of his thoughtfulness.

'Thank you SO much,' I said with too much feeling; but he did not look uncomfortable. He led me across the living-room and opened another door. I was in a little room of sprigged chintz and scrubbed oak furniture; very much the spare room, or the bedroom in some tasteful country hotel. The naked wood seemed to be declaiming, 'I'm honest — no tricks about me. I haven't even any wax on me.'

'Do you think you've got everything you want?' Tom asked. 'The bathroom's just next door. I've put the new tooth brush out.'

I thanked him again for doing so much for me and he said:

'Oh, that's nothing,' then added something silly, like, 'Don't let the fleas bite.'

After coming back from the bathroom, I half undressed, then snuggled into the warm bed. The moon was up in the sky, surprising me with its face, for I had noticed nothing as I sat in the dark with Andrew. Its discouraging light seeped into the floor in an hard unfeeling square. Even as I gazed at it, fascinated by its unearthly, dusty chill, I heard the nightingales quite near the house. Their song, so overlaid, so caked with human imaginings, struck me to-night quite differently. I could not read unending heartache, or sad sweet unreasoning joy into it. They appeared to me as watchmen, paid to guard the house, who sang and warbled mechanically to show that they kept awake. This curious conception of them grew into a conviction. It was then that I must have fallen asleep.

I awoke to find Tom bending over me. My heart was beating very fast and through mists of half-consciousness I tried to remember what had terrified me. I was still frightened. Little cries which I did not utter kept rising in my throat, then sinking back, as if to lie in wait until my

control should weaken. Tom's beaky nose was near, half a threat and half a reassurance. He loomed over me like a small thunder cloud, or a grizzly bear, all furry at the edges.

'Are you all right now?' Are you awake? he asked gently. 'You were calling out. I expect you had a nightmare.'

'Was I making an awful noise?' I asked excitedly. 'I can't think what I was dreaming of. I hardly ever call out in my sleep.'

A sudden wave of shame swept over me. This final scene was all that was needed to damn me in their eyes for ever. I saw Andrew in the future turning to Tom and saying:

'Don't you remember that ridiculous woman who began screaming in the middle of the night?'

But Tom was still looking at me anxiously.

'I came in,' he explained, 'because I thought something might have got through the window and frightened you. The trouble about sleeping on the ground floor is that cats do sometimes jump in, and hedgehogs and dogs make strange noises just outside.'

In my alarm I had sat bolt upright in bed. Now I was shivering. I clutched my bare arms and shoulders, both for warmth, and to hide my half-dressed state from Tom. Without seeming to notice anything, Tom pulled up the eider-down and settled it round my shoulders. He did not immediately remove his arms, so that they hung round me as if he had forgotten about them. Heavy and comforting, they were the arms of a sleeping friend. I was incongruously reminded of the 'Babes in the Wood'. It seemed probable that the nightingales might soon all hop into the room, carrying leaves in their beaks to make a blanket over us. In our hanging together there was a drowsy cessation of strain, a loosening of bands. I could feel the relief of tears dammed up behind my eyes. I waited for them unconcernedly.

It was then that I heard the slight noise outside the door. There was a delicate knock, then Andrew's voice, much lighter and more fairylike, almost whispered:

'May I come in?'

Without waiting for an answer he turned the door-handle and stood in the square of moonlight. Seen in that aluminium deadness, with the dark stripes of his dressing-gown turned into velvety sooty eels, he made one think at once of a dwarf at the Court of Spain painted by Velasquez. He had that everlasting, unmoving, expressionless quality. He watched and listened. The skirts of his dressing-gown stirred very, very slightly. This made him appear more monumental than ever.

I was pleased that Tom did not immediately remove his arms from me. It would have been such a mean and paltry gesture. In his sleepiness he gradually let them slip, then turned his head and exclaimed:

‘Oh, hullo, Andrew. Susan’s been having nightmares.’

‘I heard her cry out and wondered if anything was wrong,’ Andrew said, still standing quite still.

Tom began slapping his flanks and feeling in his pyjama jacket pocket. It was a sort of dumb show to express his need of a cigarette. I told him to look in my bag on the table. I guessed the cigarette would be slightly scented from my powder and I knew he would not like this; but I took a sort of perverse pleasure in thinking that with each puff he would be not very favourably reminded of me.

‘And I’VE got some sweets in MY pocket,’ Andrew said suddenly. He was like a child vying with his schoolfellows. He came towards my bed holding out the paper bag. I took a sort of butter-scotch toffee and started to crunch it appreciatively. Meanwhile Andrew was making efforts to scramble on to the end of my bed. I knew he would hate to be helped, so I let him pull himself up laboriously. He lay back against the wall to rest.

‘You don’t mind us like this all round you, do you?’ he asked, turning to me abruptly. He still spoke in his new light voice. He seemed to be afraid of breaking up the stillness of the night. I felt how right he was.

‘Of course not,’ I said, ‘it would be nice to talk a little in the moonlight.’

My new ease startled me. Andrew no longer held any terrors. I was almost about to fall into the trap of treating him as a pet, a kitten or a marmoset. My only anxiety was that he would have heartburnings over finding Tom's sleepy arms around me; for I had already quite convinced myself that, if he loved anyone in the world, it was Tom, and that his love would not be of the sharing kind. I tried to study each feature in the moonlight. I thought he looked a little wistful, a little far away, like a child who knows his fate is in the hands of others; but perhaps this was imagination. In my present outflowing mood I was too prepared for emotion and pathos in everyone. Tom sprawling near me, half on the low bedside table, half on the edge of the mattress, was extraordinarily comforting. He said nothing, but pulled at his cigarette and blew out the smoke with a noisy unself-consciousness that I loved to hear. The shadow from his head and shoulders fell across my face, shrouding me protectively. I delighted to look out from my cave at the long arched shape of my body under the bedclothes. In the moonlight it was like one of those mediaeval coffins of silvery stone, or like a great cocoon wrapped round in its web of a thousand thousand strands. I was balanced between thoughts of death and birth in a wonderful 'now' of living. The nightingales were still singing. Once more they were transformed, this time into a bird orchestra performing chamber music while we took our light refreshments of butterscotch and cigarettes. I saw them in my mind, comic as crows, or the monkey musicians in Dresden china. They cocked their heads, swivelled their beady eyes and muttered like parrots.

Andrew held his sweets out to me again and I took two in a sort of sheer exuberance, a throwback to childish slyness and greed. We munched and crunched, making a noise of footsteps on a shingly beach. I wondered what Andrew was thinking. He had suddenly become in my eyes so much less important. I took it at first that this was entirely due to the change in my own attitude; but now the slightest of misgivings stirred for a moment. Had he become innocuous

and almost childlike because, for the time being, he had retreated into himself to think and to plan? Had he pulled in his head and left his grotesque little tortoise body, hard and strong, to be patted and patronized by soft pink fingers? The thought faded almost as soon as it had awoken. Andrew sitting there on the end of my bed, his little drumstick legs stuck out straight before him, was almost as comic and endearing as the nightingale orchestra I had imagined.

Again I caught myself out in a sentimental dodging of what I really felt. He was like my fancied bird orchestra, not because he was comic or lovable, but because he, like birds performing human actions, was sinister and a little frightening.

Giving my hand an angry little pat, I sat up more in bed, wriggled my shoulders under the eiderdown and determined not to spoil the present moment by barren wonderings. It was enough that we were watching the moon through the night, happy in our sleeplessness, thinking our thoughts, as though we had to be serious about the business of living for ever.

They left me just before dawn. Andrew and I had eaten all the sweets, Tom had smoked all my cigarettes. We had talked in lazy snatches, enjoying our own and each other's truisms. They had been solemn and deep and soothing in the stillness of the night.

As I lay on my pillow, alone once more, I thought of Tom. There had been no need for anything when he had left. A word or sign would have jarred me through and through. Even a look would have seemed horribly crude and furtive. He kept his face averted and called good night airily, laughing at the hour. I leaned from the bed giving all my attention to Andrew.

'I hope you'll sleep,' I said, 'I'm afraid my nightmare has ruined your night.'

'Oh, I like a vigil,' he answered quaintly; 'I mean a communal one. That's why I liked the air-raids in the war. One sat about and drank tea and felt cosy because of the danger.'

He left me with this last word which is always spelt in red capitals in my mind, I suppose because I once must have seen it as a child written thus on some mysterious electrical contrivance barred round with iron spikes.

I could not go to sleep again, but I lay there resting, smoothing out all talk from my brain until I became aware of the first cold weariness of the dawn. It seemed amazing that this watery misery, as sordid as a slum, could conquer the monotonous magic of the moon, but it grew and grew in strength, filling out the trivial anxieties of the day in front of me, until I knew that I must get up and dress. I shuddered at the anticlimax of breakfast, the embarrassment of good-byes and thanks yous, the business of starting the car and arriving at the station in time for the train. The thought suddenly came to me that I could escape everything by leaving now, on foot, before anyone was astir.

Terence Tiller

THE SWORDS OF GLASS

I turn in the morning to defy, as I pass
 the shabby antique-shop window, the swords of glass:
 a blue crossing a green, but on each hilt
 a bine of crimson, a frozen braid of gilt
 and of water-crystal. Their twin smooth tips are sharp
 as briars; the blades though flute and twist and warp
 like barley-sugar if it glittered, or the gold
 shafts of a roundabout. Self-enclosed and cold,
 they creep with childhood's nausea for the too
 richly-confected plane which is not quite true.
 As these are not: not toys, yet they would smash
 to sharp confetti round the fighter; never a flash
 in beauty or gallantry; they have never been
 crossed, but in mocking rest, the blue and the green.

I know them, the nature of all glass, the old sly
 shallowness of the goat's the parrot's and the Arab's eye:
 the blind perspective sparkle. Glass is a liar:
 the air of images, witch-water, the dead man's fire;
 dark-diamonded room of earth, light without heat,
 where dazzle of limbeck and hell of mirror meet.
 Lies, they have stabbed at lies, and the gesture lied.
 The blue sword entered dryly a dust-bubble's side,
 dust in damnation's effigy of a Christ; and there
 an evil Nothing vainly crucified air.
 Strong in the green sword, Satan leaned above a well,
 stabbed his own image, flared like a nova, and fell.
 Colours and acts met on the mirror's face:
 hell's ingrown icicle, suicide of glass,
 I turn in the morning to defy as I pass.

James Stern

THE WOMAN WHO WAS LOVED

The day after Miss Higgins had gone, nothing remained of her but her tennis racket. Ned and Miriam had found it in the attic – a soiled, slightly warped thing with a rubber grip, on which the now departed governess had inked her name in large square letters: ETHEL B. HIGGINS.

‘It’s a pity she got engaged to Dr Stimson,’ Mrs Turnbull said to her husband when the car had carried the woman away. ‘She was a good sort. It’ll be hard to find a better.’

‘I don’t like governesses who marry,’ grunted Mr Turnbull.

‘She gave the children a wonderful time,’ his wife continued. ‘There’s no doubt about that. I do hope they won’t be too unhappy. Miriam’s such – such a sensitive child. *Underneath.*’

‘Children!’ mocked the father. ‘They don’t care!’

‘You never can tell,’ Mrs Turnbull said knowingly. ‘They were awfully fond of her. I wonder what the new one will be like. I wish I’d been able to see her. It’s such a risk taking them on recommendation, and at such short notice. Women like Miss Higgins,’ she sighed, ‘don’t grow on every tree!’

Bored with the subject, Mr Turnbull relapsed into silence. The name of Miss Higgins, indeed, might never have been mentioned again had it not been for the tennis racket, which Ned and Miriam brought immediately to their parents. Mr and Mrs Turnbull were in the dining-room, sitting over their breakfast, when the children burst in.

‘Higgy’s left her racket behind!’ they both shouted at once.

‘Shish, children!’ admonished their mother, a finger to her lips. ‘Daddy’s trying to read the paper!’

Mr Turnbull peered over the top of the *Morning Post*. 'Time the new governess came,' he growled. 'Never heard such an infernal din.'

'Oh,' asked Ned and Miriam simultaneously, 'when's she coming?'

'To-morrow evening,' Mrs Turnbull said.

'What's her name?'

'Miss Whitmore.'

'What's she like? How old is she?'

'I don't know, Miriam.'

'On spec!' Ned said.

Mr Turnbull cleared his throat with irritation.

'Now leave the racket here,' said his wife briskly, 'and run up and clean your teeth. I can see you haven't touched them yet.'

'And then what shall we do?' asked Ned for the fifth time since Miss Higgins' departure.

Mr Turnbull laid down the *Morning Post*. 'God dammit,' he shouted, with all the authority he could command, 'did you hear what your mother said?'

The children looked away. Then, very slowly, shuffling their feet, they slunk from the room.

The periods between governesses – the family averaged two a year – were not easy days for Mrs Turnbull, for then she had to take charge of her children, a task for which she knew herself to be unfit and which embarrassed both her and them. It had been the mother's habit to see her children regularly three times a day: first, at breakfast, when Ned and Miriam came to say Good morning; then, at eleven o'clock, during Lessons, when she called on them in the schoolroom – a duty always the most painful for her to perform, for in the presence of the current governess she found herself invariably dumb. Each morning as she walked down the long corridor to the large bare schoolroom (which Mr Turnbull had had specially built 'to keep out the din') she would ask herself: 'Now what shall I say to-day? I must think of something new!' Yet when the moment

came, when, closing her eyes with embarrassment, she knocked, and shyly, carefully turned the handle of the schoolroom door, her imagination refused to function and for four long years the mornings of Ned, Miriam, and all their governesses had been interrupted with the same unanswerable greeting: 'Well, how are we getting along to-day?'

The third visit, for which there were two alternatives, took place between the hours of six and eight. Should the parents themselves have visitors, then Ned was dressed in a tunic of white or blue, Miriam in muslin of the same colour, and the two 'came down' to say How d'you do and eventually Good night. But in the ordinary course of events, Mrs Turnbull would 'come up' for this purpose, entering what was still known as the Day Nursery with that diffidence people reveal when in a strange house they open doors in search of a toilet. Once inside, she would bid Good evening to the governess, and then, no matter what the hour, turn to her children and say: 'Now hurry up, both of you, it's long past your bedtime!'

While they prepared themselves for sleep, she would gaze out of the window, stare at the view, move a stray toy from one place to another, remark upon Ned's untidiness, the prospects of the weather, the length of the children's hair, and occasionally whisper into their ears a question as to whether they had 'gone somewhere properly this morning, dear.' Finally, when Ned and Miriam were in their pyjamas and could think of no means of postponing any longer the last moments of their day, she would move into the Night Nursery, where, with a peremptory 'Now then,' she would lower herself into the one arm-chair, lean forward, cross her hands in her lap, and close her eyes. From the habit of years the children recognized this performance as the signal for each in turn to kneel at their mother's feet, place their elbows on her knees, lock their fingers, and proceed to mumble two quite unintelligible prayers, followed by a smothered recitation of the hymn: *Gentle Jesus, meek and mild ...*

This always embarrassing duty accomplished, the mother would rise and follow them to the narrow twin beds, and there lean over and lay her face for a moment on their foreheads, pat their curls, bid Good night to the governess in the Day Nursery, and leave the room as a burglar might escape from the scene of a carefully-planned crime.

In one respect only was Mrs Turnbull's position less painful when a governess was not present: there was the absence of that ever-critical eye keeping watch in silence on her helplessness. It was never long, however, before realization of this fact served only as a reminder of her failings: her lack of contact with, and control over, the children infamous Nature had allowed her to bring into the world. Though unconscious of the fact that she behaved toward her own offspring as she would have toward another's, she did realize that they, aware of her indifference, offered her no respect; and that she, in consequence, gained no authority. Harsh words had little effect, while her last resort, the threat of their father's name, produced only silence – a stubborn, unconquerable resentment, commonly known as 'the sulks'. When they disappeared between meals, she did not know where they were. She went out into the garden and in a high-pitched, bird-like voice, cried between her hands: 'Cooo-eeee! Cooo-eeee!' During the ensuing silence she would stamp her foot, then call out their names: 'Ned, where are you? Mirry – aaam!' As often as not they were within earshot, sitting in the branches of their favourite tree, the enormous lime behind the tennis court, giggling into fists stuffed between their jaws.

In the evenings, when she came to 'see the children in their bath' (a duty she now performed only on Saturday nights), they would scream, at first with laughter and then with anger, crying out to her that no nurse or governess had ever washed them 'that way'. It was here in the bathroom, when she was alone with and close to her children in their nakedness, that the full realization of the gulf between herself and them made itself manifest as at no other

place or time. She would stand over them and, to the accompaniment of the hissing sound made by grooms when curry-combing a horse, scrub their backs and legs and arms and necks in such a way that the soap splashed over their faces and seeped into their eyes. And when they howlingly resisted, guarding themselves against her treatment by covering their smarting eyes with their hands, she would suddenly feel afraid, as though the two screaming children in the tub were not of her own flesh and blood, but some strange reptiles intent on doing her harm.

'Out you get!' she'd cry. 'A little soap won't kill you! Get out and dry yourselves, before I go and fetch Daddy!' To which threat they reacted as they always did, by sulking silently. Beyond this, her behaviour had no consequences, bore no fruit; and the prospect of the next governess, of Miss Higgins' successor, of the return to normal – without which children, like adults, can rarely live content – was welcomed as much by Ned and Miriam as by the man and woman whose incomes alone made the procession of governesses possible.

Yet not one of them was prepared for the shock created by Miss Whitmore. No one bearing the remotest resemblance to the new arrival had ever been seen inside the Turnbull home. At sight of the drawn yellow face, the veined and sickle-shaped cushions under the mournful eyes; the poor, lifeless, mouse-coloured hair raked up from the lean neck and rolled into a wad under the tiny hat of black straw – at sight of her the children, after a momert's incredulous stare, turned in their tracks and bolted. Not until they had reached the Nursery and slammed the door did they give vent to their astonishment and laughter. 'The old hag!' choked Ned, throwing himself, convulsed, into the one arm-chair.

Although mirth was the last sensation Miss Whitmore's arrival created in the parents, it was nevertheless Mr Turnbull who, when the butler had left the room during dinner that night, uttered the remark which he continued to repeat

long after the woman who caused it had turned her back for ever on its author. 'I'm afraid, my dear,' he half-whispered to his wife, 'that Miss Whitmore is not a product of your agency's top drawer!'

But the outward appearance of the new governess, as the children were the first to discover, was far from the woman's only peculiarity. The first shock came when she spoke. From the lined and bony throat, encircled by a string of black beads, her voice came booming out, its tone as deep and powerful as that of a man. What Miss Whitmore said, however, punctually at ten o'clock on the first morning, was no less unexpected.

'Put away all those books!' she thundered, and the command echoed round the schoolroom walls.

The children stared. They stood, opposite one another at the table, paralysed, dumb. Put away their books – those thumbled and tattered primers from which all their lessons had been learned! They glanced up at the woman, then, furtively, back at each other, with wide, bewildered eyes.

At the head of the table the thin frail figure in black, the worn yellow hands clasped over her meagre stomach, stood motionless. The children could not move.

'Dummies!' boomed Miss Whitmore. 'Those books, I said! Away with them! Out with evil memories!'

Slowly, with the half-hearted motions of those faced with the incomprehensible, the children began stacking their worn volumes one on top of the other.

'Listen!' came the bark again, 'I'll have you run up and down that terrace if you can't move quicker than that!'

But it was Miss Whitmore who moved first – moved so fast, in fact, so surprisingly, that the children stepped back bewildered, to watch, with consternation quickly giving way to awe, the long bony hand shoot out and grab the books from the table. Fascinated, they stared at the woman as she then pitched each book, with apparent recklessness but astonishing aim, into the empty fireplace.

'That,' cried Miss Whitmore, when she had cleared the

table, 'is why you're dummies! You're bored, that's the trouble with you! No one should ever be bored!'

Still the children revealed no visible sign that they had heard or understood. Perplexed by what they had just been witness to, they stood gaping into the fireplace, at their thumbled and ink-stained books and papers – the living proof of all the facts and figures laboured over in that room – when suddenly Miss Whitmore's hand came down on the table with such violence that they were shaken, finally, to attention.

'Dummies!' she boomed again. 'You're still asleep! Out you go on to the terrace. Out of this room! Out into God's air!' And turning from them, she steered herself stiffly, arms rigid, toward the French window. Gripping the brass handle, she opened the door.

'Now then!' she commanded, as though she were addressing a couple of puppies. 'Out you go!'

The children followed her at a careful distance. Then, drawing near, they sidled round her in the doorway, stepped out on to the stone porch. At the sound of their sandals on the stone, Miss Whitmore lowered her eyes.

'Shoes!' she cried, clutching Ned by the arm. 'Shoes! Off with the beastly things! Away with one of man's silliest inventions!'

Still slow to comprehend the unexpected, Ned and Miriam stared first at their feet, then quickly at each other, finally up at her. At last, with the infinite precaution of those who fear to be made fools of, they began unclasping the straps of their sandals.

'Hurry, young man!' Miss Whitmore said, her hand still on his arm. 'What's that they call you? Ned?' Suddenly she let out a chuckle of mirth. 'Ridiculous!' she cried, her voice breaking, high. 'That's what they call the donkey! Your name's Edward – perfectly good name. Now then, both of you, run!' And clapping her hands, she made a mock rush at them.

Stepping gingerly out on to the gravel, they took to their

bare heels and, like bolting colts, tore along the terrace as though to prove to her that, however inactive their brains might be, their limbs at least were in a very different condition.

Behind them, unseen, alone, the woman stood still, while there passed over her faded face an almost imperceptible transformation: the pale lips slowly parted; the mournful eyes receded behind their surrounding web of lines, and a filmy substance rose and made them shine. Miss Whitmore was smiling ... But instantly the mask – the creases, the eyes, the lips – fell back into place, and she raised her hands to shield her mouth. ‘About – *turn!*’ she thundered.

Halting near the end of the terrace, the children swung round, lifting their feet high at the sudden pain. As they drew up before her, flushed and panting, her eyes went over them, from head to toe. ‘Keep away from shoes,’ she said, ‘and you may grow up at least with decent feet ...! Now, come in.’

She followed her into the schoolroom. ‘Put those beastly things away!’ she commanded.

Ned picked up the sandals and placed them on top of the piano.

‘Now then,’ Miss Whitmore said, as she walked toward the table, ‘next thing you’ve got to do is to forget everything you ever learned!’

But before the children had had time to reach their seats, there came a fant knock upon the door and Mrs. Turnbull stepped silently into the room.

‘Well,’ her tongue said, ‘how are we getting along to-day?’ But instead of advancing further, as was her custom she stood still on the threshold, staring mystified at her children as they prepared to take their chairs at the table.

‘What on earth,’ she asked at last, ‘have you done with your sandals?’

They paused in the act of sitting down, then glanced, not for sympathy, but defensively, at their mother, at their feet, and finally – with the look of those who share a secret – at each other.

But Miss Whitmore had already risen from her chair. With one hand on its back, and the other fingering the black beads at her neck, she turned to Mrs Turnbull.

‘Children,’ she said, as though quoting some well-worn maxim, ‘children should refrain from wearing shoes until bare feet cause them embarrassment.’

Miss Whitmore sat down.

Ned and Miriam’s eyes met, exchanging what no one but they knew were smiles. Mrs Turnbull, her face a study of astonishment, continued to stare. Then, as though someone had prodded her from behind, she turned and escaped rapidly from the silent room.

At lunch that day she said to her husband: ‘What do you think I found the children doing in the schoolroom this morning?’

Mr Turnbull hunched his shoulders, shook his head.

‘Walking about the room in bare feet!’ cried his wife. ‘Ned’s sandals were on the piano – on the *piano*!’

‘Peculiar,’ grunted Mr Turnbull.

Such was not the reaction his wife had desired. ‘If only that were all,’ she added quickly. ‘What d’you think that – that Whitmore woman said? Children, she said, without so much as giving me a name, oughtn’t to wear shoes until they want to! Did you ever hear such cheek?’

‘She sounds about as awful as she looks,’ observed her husband; and he added: ‘I never saw an Englishwoman look like that before!’

His wife breathed a sigh of satisfaction. She said: ‘I was thinking of the poor children.’ Then, pausing to let the subterfuge sink in, she murmured: ‘Poor darlings, they looked so unhappy. If only Miss Higgins hadn’t – hadn’t fallen in love!’

‘Well, one thing’s certain,’ said Mr Turnbull, with rare heartiness, ‘no one’s going to fall in love with *her*!’

Because children are more adaptable than adults, because their memories are short and they are not burdened with responsibility or convention, Miss Whitmore at the end of

a week was little more strange to Ned and Miriam than had been any of her predecessors at a similar period in their reigns. They accepted her violence, her code of values, as they would have a new home, or as, after a period of time short enough to shock the thoughtless, they would have accepted the death or disappearance of their father or their mother. The young are no less compassionate than their elders. Innocent, and therefore incapable of understanding the subtleties of hypocrisy, they live in the present, grieving only for the loss of those whom they sincerely love – a love, as often as not, bestowed upon a rabbit or a doll.

As the days passed it seemed quite natural, in fact, even perfectly sensible (as indeed it was), that this faded woman with the booming voice should fill their schoolroom hours with denunciations directed at everything that, by endless repetition and poring over primers, had previously been dinned into their heads. In language they could understand she would inveigh not only against all accepted means of enlightenment, against text-books, dictionaries, the practice of committing information to heart; but against false indulgence of the commoner human instincts: against the mania of acquisition, the hoarding of money, against the collecting of moths, butterflies and birds' eggs; against the hunting and shooting to death of wild animals; against the evil of ridicule ('Look into your own heart,' she once boomed at them till they blushed, 'before you laugh at another's face!'); and, above all, she would pound into them warnings against the danger of having been born an Englishman.

This last, they soon discovered, was Miss Whitmore's favourite subject. It was through it, in fact, that gradually her diatribes began to decrease and the mornings of invective to turn into monologues that led, at last, to horizons more familiar to the children, and thence to regions which, while geographically near, were in reality as remote from them as were the lives of those who spent their days there. The first sign that Miss Whitmore was about to alter the

tenor of her verbal curriculum revealed itself one morning after she had been expounding her theories on what is known, among adults, as the Myth of Racial Superiority, but which Miss Whitmore described as 'all this nonsense about people in one country being better than those in another'. She had just maintained, much to the children's surprise, that there was no such thing as an Englishman, when she suddenly broke off, rose from her chair, went upstairs and returned with a book – an object so rarely used by her in the schoolroom that Ned could not conceal his desire to learn its title.

'Well, Edward,' said Miss Whitmore, 'I'm glad to see you don't believe curiosity is going to kill you any more than it did the proverbial puss! Curiosity is an excellent thing. So is this book. But that's not the reason I have it here. I brought it down because – just as I don't think you should go to church simply because others do – I don't want you to believe a word I say simply because I say it. I don't suppose I've uttered an original thought in my life. What's more, I doubt very much if you will, either. – Well, anyway, the author of this book and I are great friends. We agree on most things. The fact that he died over two hundred years ago makes no difference. He was a man who said and believed what I've just told you: that there's no such thing as an Englishman – and don't you ever forget it. You happen to have been born of an old and wealthy family. Well, the sooner you forget that the better. This is what my friend had to say on that subject.'

Raising her head and closing her eyes, Miss Whitmore was silent for a moment as though summoning her memory to obey her will. Then, in a low, steady voice, she solemnly recited:

'Great families of yesterday we show,

And lords whose parents were the Lord knows who.'

Miss Whitmore opened her eyes. 'My goodness!' she suddenly cried, 'write that down...' While the children began hunting for pencils and paper, she again closed her eyes.

'Your Roman - Saxon - Danish - Norman English,' she quoted.

From this amphibious ill-born mob began
That vain, ill-natured thing, an Englishman.

'You can write that down, too,' Miss Whitmore said. And, while the children wrote, she slowly repeated the lines.

'Well now,' she said, as they finished, 'shall I tell you who my friend is? No, I won't. I'll tell you the title of one of his books.' And raising the volume in her hands, she stood it upright on the table for them to see.

Both children exclaimed at once: '*Robinson Crusoe*!' 'So?' said Miss Whitmore, 'then Mr Defoe is a friend of yours, too?'

'Oh, yes!' cried Miriam.

'Oh, yes!' Ned repeated. 'Higg - er - Miss Higgins gave us *Robinson Crusoe* as a holiday task!'

'*Task!*' boomed Miss Whitmore, with a passionate energy that still inspired them with awe. 'What good is a holiday if it has a task in it? What good, for that matter, to read about Man Friday keeping himself alive on a desert island, if you can't boil an egg to keep yourselves alive in a luxurious modern home?'

To which remark Ned, despite himself, let loose an irrepressible snort of laughter. Whereupon Miss Whitmore, demanding to know what was 'funny about that', cuffed him over the head with the palm of her hand, then dragged him off, convulsed between laughter and astonishment, to the kitchen.

'All right, then,' she said, planting him in front of the stove and asking the flabbergasted cook for a saucepan and an egg, 'all right, Edward, boil this!'

'I - I can't, Miss Whitmore,' stammered Ned, his face solemn at last, his head lowered, and his feet scraping nervously at the unfamiliar floor.

'Can't, eh!' snorted Miss Whitmore; and, while Ned watched, she proceeded to boil the water, then cook three eggs, which she and the children ate, later, for their lunch.

While Ned and Miriam were engrossed in a heated argument over Time and the Consistency of Yokes (which Ned won because, as he said, 'God dammit, I saw it happen, see!') the elder Turnbulls were seated over another meal at the far end of the house. 'What d'you think,' asked Mrs Turnbull of her husband, 'what d'you think Mrs West told me just now?'

Grunting, Mr Turnbull hunched his shoulders.

'That - that Whitmore burst into the kitchen, demanded a saucepan, and boiled some eggs!'

'Boiled some eggs!' repeated her husband, swallowing half a potato. 'The woman's mad!'

'What's more, she said that poor little Ned had been dragged in there to watch. He was almost in tears, she said.'

'Children,' pronounced her husband pompously, 'have no business in the kitchen.'

'That's just what Mrs West said. In the middle of their lessons, too.'

'I won't have a raving lunatic in the house,' said Mr Turnbull with finality. 'Not for another day. That woman should be certified.'

'And do you know what she told Mrs West?' His wife lowered her voice as though she were about to confide to him a long-kept secret. 'That one day the children will have to use their hands as well as their heads! She said that the days of governesses are numbered!'

'So far as she and we are concerned,' cried Mr Turnbull, smacking his thigh with one hand and wiping his mouth with the other, 'Miss Whitmore never spoke a truer word! It is for you, my dear, to see to that - at once!'

That evening, for the first time in several Saturdays, Mrs Turnbull mounted the stairs ostensibly to 'see the children in their bath'. She found them, to her surprise, alone - playing peacefully in the tub with a fleet of celluloid warships.

'Well,' she said brightly, seating herself on a stool, 'all alone?'

Her question was greeted with enquiring stares.

'Miss Whitmore!' said Mrs Turnbull in a tone of slight irritation. 'Doesn't she come and see you in your bath?'

'Oh, no!' answered Ned and Miriam, as though the very suggestion were too novel to contemplate.

'But – well, hasn't she – ever?'

'Oh, no!' they repeated.

Mrs Turnbull rose to her feet. 'Now, look here, children,' she began in a tone that made Ned and Miriam exchange an apprehensive glance. 'I want your – your honest opinion. You're' – she hesitated, out of her depth – 'you're old enough now to tell me – what you think. Er – I'd like to know – do you – er – *like* Miss Whitmore?'

For several seconds the bath-tub water was still; there was not an audible breath in the bathroom, not a sound throughout the house. Then Ned, with his head down and a splashing flourish of his arm, grabbed a warship and sent it spinning toward his sister. Miriam caught it and sent it spinning back.

'Ned! Miriam!' exclaimed their mother with an impatient stamp of her foot. 'I'm asking you a question. Did you hear me? Stop playing with that – that toy!'

Miriam promptly held the warship under water, while Ned, covering a blind and wrinkled face with his hand, muttered: 'She's all right.'

Miriam slowly picked up a flannel and, without raising her head, started lathering it with soap. 'Yes,' she murmured, 'she's all right.'

'Well,' said their mother, making small attempt to conceal her satisfaction, 'it's pretty clear what *that* amount of enthusiasm means!' And with this, she pecked her children on the cheek and bid them good night.

The following morning, when Ned and Miriam came down to the schoolroom punctually at ten o'clock, Miss Whitmore was not at the table. 'Beat the old girl this time,' Ned said, and they settled down to wait. They pulled out some paper and started playing Noughts-and-Crosses.

Then Miriam accused Ned of cheating and the game ended in a squabble.

Ned leaned back and yawned. 'Maybe she's sick,' he said at last. 'I'm going up to look.' 'Me, too,' Miriam said, and she followed her brother out of the room, up the stairs, past the Nursery, to the door of the Governess's Room. Outside, they stood still, their heads on one side, listening. They glanced at each other and stifled a desire to laugh. Then Ned raised a fist and knocked carefully on the door. When there was no answer, he knocked again, louder. Then, quickly, as though half-expecting to be greeted by a corpse, he turned the handle and flung open the door. Before them, through closed windows, the sun blazed in on a spotless, uninhabited room.

They turned to one another on the threshold, their mouths open, their eyes wide. 'Gone!' breathed Ned. Miriam said nothing.

Closing the door quietly behind them they tip-toed away from it as though they had left someone sleeping there. Together, in silence, they passed along the corridor, down the stairs. They walked on silently through the schoolroom and out on to the terrace and from the terrace, never turning, they moved on soundlessly over the lawn of the tennis court, coming to a halt only when they had reached their favourite tree, the enormous lime. There, without a word, they climbed into its immense branches and sat down, hidden from one another by thick canopies of sweet-smelling leaves.

'Cooo - eeee!'

The high-pitched, bird-like voice struck strangely across the country silence.

'Cooo - eeee!'

But still the children did not speak. Unknown to one another, tears were falling down their faces and their fists were stuffed between their jaws.

Peter Yates

LIGHT AND DARK

A rumour of midsummer in the wind
 Stung the old wound, and once again
 Between bird-twitching branches like a tongue
 Came tiger sun : light liquid to explore
 The forest's leafy floor
 And spider-creeping hush of shade.

High above the emerald tossing tops
 The blue airs sung ; but in my gloom
 Of green, striped by gold lashes of the sun
 Thought's web was spun : a net of human words
 Murdered the mindless birds
 For glitter of interior light.

So as we lay, in light and shade entombed
 Where dying turns to brilliant growth
 And fancy hears the fallen acorn groan,
 Fear moved a stone : the mind's dark underside
 Which loving had denied
 Rose to eclipse the vigorous sun.

Saul Bellow

THE THOUGHTS OF SERGEANT
GEORGE FLAVIN

*(On his Way to a Retreat for Catholic Men of the
Chicago Police Force)*

This year I'd have just as soon not gone to this, and if I could have got out of it I would. But it ain't smart to go asking about it and they better not think you're getting ready to beef. The most you can do is let on that if it wouldn't be held too much against you, you wouldn't mind missing once. In something where the fix is in way up there, you want to watch what you're doing. What got the schedule of the bowling league changed if it wasn't some monsignor from the bishop's office on the telephone to somebody in the commissioner's, or whatever the channel is? You can see how quick they get results in a case like the Alderman Casimir O'Binski case, when he filed for a divorce without asking anybody's advice. The organization canned him pretty fast, as strong in his ward as he was. Before then, he could grab his revolver and run out of his tavern on Elston Avenue to shoot at a guy who owed him two bucks, and that was nothing. After the trial he was still picked in the Primaries. If it was only that he blew his top twice a year, he'd be in the City Council yet, or even in the legislature; he was popular for his hot temper, throwing steins and bottles and wrestling his customers Zybisco style on the street and the car tracks. There was a congressman like that who killed himself finally out of a ten-story window, and O'Binski could have got a lot farther than ward politics except he wasn't smart enough to stay out of this one kind of trouble and tried to turn in his wife, even if she did drink the whole beer output

of Bohemia. That he couldn't get away with no matter how dependable he was to bring in the vote.

I could think of a better way to pass a gloomy week-end of February, not that I'm disrespectful. But there's something about getting together thirty cops in a place like this that's kind of heavy and outsize, and in a chapel you realize what you wouldn't, day in and day out at the station, how it gets into your back and knees and your hands and cheeks, being a copper. There's nothing to bring it home to you like the face of a plainclothesman it takes you two looks to recognize without a hat or so far from the back seat of a squad car where you get used to seeing him; and now you notice his eye is trying to take a different hang of things than his duty one, but it can't change, and it comes out deep and queer in the set of the creases by the light of the candles, watching hard as ever. You know he's still fixed from his heart and from habit to the brim of his felt hat and the shape of his shoulders and pants in the back seat of the black Ford, chasing to brawls and knifings, to corner a peeping-tom, to a suicide on a clothes-line, to hot-head fights in pool-rooms, to a wife-beating, to get a kid's foot free from a fence or a cat down from a tree. You won't float him out of that on sweet smoke and tinging bells so easy. Hand against hand, he'll still be thinking of finger-prints in the middle of prayers.

Still there are always surprises in seeing how different ones take it. Some you see fat kids again, but for baldness, and innocent as boys; some go in with chins up like old swimmers who haven't been in the water for years and push off with an old-fashioned kick and stroke to do their fancy stuff; a few will root for their soul like acorns in the leaves; most take off their shoes and try to lie down as much as they can, used to being bored, as any policeman has to be and getting a little relaxation out of it at least, away from wife and kids. Then now and again you start to think about coming out here and sleeping in a cot, in a bare cell. For a cop to be in one, although it's without the bars of a clink,

is something; and, as you might say, he's turned himself over to be a prisoner for a few days and get a taste of what it's like from the other fellow's point of view, out of kind of a peculiar curiosity, looking at the priests as another kind of Force – only for sins, where we are for crimes – who show that nothing good comes without organizations, as God wants, each outfit inside another one and the biggest and mightiest last of all, made for every body born, and reaching from the fires of hell to the gate of heaven. And *there* there is a lock, too, with the saint who welched three times in charge of the keys, who can be trusted not to be too hard-nosed. As someone who never slipped in all his days might be.

Who would have thought of building away out here on Route 62 in the middle of truck-farms, kennels, quarries, roadhouses and such things? I got to know these parts years back when I went to caddy at Sunset Ridge. Along here was the Garden of Allah where Tony Canzoneri used to train, in that hot green park with the wasps in the air and Japanese lanterns around the dance-floor. Come out in that heat to watch him spar, why it was on your face and under your hair like brandy. A great piece of fighting furniture, his back was, and he used to sight his black head on his right glove as if he smelled blood on it, tough little cocky, while he was doing that devil's scuttle on those tough short legs of his. There was plenty of sporting money around in those days, and big red wire-spoke Stutzes and Buicks blazing back at the sun. And those big, handsome women, they'd throb you up with a look as if they put their hand on you. It was a hangout for some of the tough element of Nitti the Enforcer who walked around in their rich suits and two-tone shoes like the dangerous sons of kings who might blow death whenever they felt like. And who was there to stop them? This was around the St Valentine Massacre time, when the beer and circulation wars were on and you could prop your *Herald* on the milk bottle any rosy July morning at breakfast while you ate your

cantaloupe and read of shotgun-blasted limousines and stiff in the Whiting bulrush swamps or the ditches and quarries out this way.

And this is where the Order decided to build, six years ago. The plaster is raw on the walls yet; you can smell it when the weather is damp. It's a good chance somebody gave them fifty or sixty acres of prairie in his will. Then again, they got their own way of figuring and don't do much by accident. But when you think of the right kind of a place, you think of that whale's cave of a St. Peter's where the saint had himself crucified upside down and is supposed to be lying underneath now. And the whole city of Rome, mined and sown with catacombs of martyrs – the something to a location that makes it sainted ground. Where God is. Where the bush burned in the desert and Moses took off his shoes. And the thing of it is, how a place will come under religion that's as out of the way and as new as this one. There has to be a start though, somewhere, to close in something, to build up a wall and lay down a shadow. Isn't it the same story with the law? Where you start out in a small town with a little cottage of a sheriff's office that the tough guys crash out of, but end with the County Building in a big city. That lays on your soul heavier, and you bow your neck and think twice, and think twice again, and then another time, and give in, and sit in jail. That's the making of a place of punishment exactly as of one of services and masses. No matter what it was twenty years before, prairie, pasture, hayfield or what you like.

If that's the way even I see it, you must know the Church, centuries all over the world, has it all laid out, somewhere, with rules on top of rules and reasons over reasons, so no one will go lost or wrong who knows where to look or who to ask, and in anything at all can't get off the track the way a man by himself is bound to. There is something everybody knows: that just as you breathe, you breathe for yourself, and as your heart beats, good or bad, it beats for yourself; you never get around that. But we ain't that reliable,

to let every man do how he figures, by fits and starts, he can, but have to be kept in line. And the ones with bad natures, no better than animals, kept from hurting the next guy. What's one man by himself? Ah, the poor bastard, the little he can be or tell you, the dumbness and darkness of his mind. Take us that go around, middle-aged, with our shiny pants and the knuckles of our feet spreading out in our shoes. That's us, way down there, buried in the thick of it, in the dark, each of us. Reach out and touch a hand or touch a face, but never know anything from first to last.

Except those words of the Corinthians: *Now we command you brethren in the name of the Lord J.C. to withdraw yourselves from any brother that walketh disorderly.* Many and many's the time I've seen that brother sapped down in the back of the station; some kid, maybe, with a gimcrack pistol caught in his first holdup. You swing on him – it makes your hand heavy to think – land, and the blood sprinkles on the floor like the ink shook out of a leaky pen. I don't see no other way to do. We don't get taught that way because it isn't everybody you can trust with such a slant. You have to teach love and peace or it will get worse and worse. Everybody with sense feels the way I do, in his heart. In fact, if it's right to do it at all, it's wrong not to go the whole distance and strap them up by the hands and gash out their teeth and kick the shit out of them to protect others from worse, and it would be better in the long run. So what are we here to study mercy for?

But that's all right. There's nobody smarter. They know the wildness of the world and how it has to be stood off and what the state of things is and what our line of work is like and with who. You can't loose or bind, as they say, without strong hands and studying knots. That's the old wisdom that's held the world steady two thousand years and will be with it to the last shake, you can give odds.

Margaret Gardiner

TWO POEMS

—

I

TRANSFORMATION

Clear, clear as stones in the sea
On a clear and quiet day,
Pebble-bright, smooth and water-washed
My shining feelings lay.

I did not gauge the ripple slant
When I plunged in my hand
And instead of hard and shapely stones
Encountered close-packed sand.

I did not know how they would shrink
When I pulled them out, one by one,
Or guess their loss of lustre
When I spread them in the sun.

II

THE FRAUD

Fool, to imagine primal fire
Behind the moon's unrivalled posturing –
Cool is your love, without desire,
An empty eloquence and gesturing.
Sail – calm, magnificent – across your night,
Out-flaunt the stars' small authenticity,
Pale, in your borrowed pride, still to delight
Lovers, by unashamed duplicity.

Rupert Croft-Cooke
EAR AND BRACELET

In childhood he would go out of his way to avoid a butcher's shop. The sight of his own blood rather interested him, but the blood of others, even of animals, made him sick. Hunks of beef on a marble slab were not 'joints' to him, but recognizable pieces of bleeding flesh, and he would no more have eaten meat than have turned cannibal.

Back through the fifty years of his life he could look with horror on all the occasions when his fastidiousness had been outraged, when he had been forced to witness the crude natural sights which to other people were commonplace — street accidents, a shot rabbit, a pound of calf's liver on a plate, even a bloodshot eye or a bleeding finger.

A cheerful doctor with a loud derisory voice, himself as beefy as the carcasses which Neville abhorred, had once told him that this peculiarity of his could very easily be cured.

'Any psychiatrist could get that out of your system in no time,' he had assured him. 'Soon find out what was at the back of your mind. Some damned nonsense from your childhood, probably.'

But Neville had shuddered at the thought of this dissection, too, and had continued to hold his nose and close his eyes whenever it was necessary. This had been made more easy by his adequate private income. He lived a finicky and cloistered life, picking his way delicately through young manhood and maturity till he found himself, a neat and spinsterish pilgrim, approaching the frontiers of middle age. It was then that he decided to go to Spain.

What prompted that sudden decision he could have explained, but falsely. He would have said that he felt the need

to see more of the world than he had glimpsed from the trim fastness of his Surrey garden, or he would have spoken knowledgeably of architecture or omelettes. He believed that he had chosen Spain because, in an early and restrained enthusiasm for the work of Cervantes, he had learned to write and speak an academic Castilian far more fluently than he spoke French. But in reality it seems likely that he was drawn by the hypnotism of antipathy to the country of blood and sand.

From his first arrival in Barcelona, he moved as though he were sleep-walking through a beautiful but demoniac nightmare. He saw, or believed that he could see, a natural savagery in the people, in their eyes, in the ferine grace of their movements. He could hear in their voices a silky animalism and believed that their very laughter was the triumphant bellow of the hunter. He saw them as primitive, red in tooth and claw (as he whispered to himself), their civilized manners no more an essential part of them than the elegant clothes they wore. During this first week in the city he saw three men of the Guardia Civil set about a pair of malefactors with their truncheons and as he shrank behind the interested witnesses he realized that none of them felt surprised or shocked by the spectacle. He saw skinny dogs and overworked horses, deformed or limbless beggars, scrofulous children and the corpse of a cat which had been run over by a car and was left to be flattened in the roadway.

Yet, he was startled to find, he was awed rather than repelled, frightened rather than disgusted. It did not occur to him to leave this dreadful but gorgeous country and return to the neat domesticity of England. It was as though in coming here he had taken an irrevocable step, as though he had died and found himself in a place and among people unimaginable in life. His days were unreal, but not unhappy.

Then slowly he began to make acquaintances. He was living in an excellent residential hotel under the shadow of Tibidabo, a fierce little peak which jutted up against the Mediterranean sunset and at noon exposed the terra-cotta

nakedness of its barren soil. In the lounge of this hotel Neville learned to chat amiably with the porcelain-faced old ladies in their mourning clothes who sat holding needlework in their exquisite little white hands. He became one of the odd isolated society of such a place – a family from the Canary Isles perpetually planning to return but remaining here to discuss their home for two years and seeming likely never to leave, a lawyer attending no place of business, a friendly old lady who was reputed to be rich and held daily court for her countless children and grandchildren, a lean and sallow Marqués engaged paradoxically in the importing of eggs from Majorca and a young Colonial from Rio de Oro, that minute strip of West Africa which is all that is left to Spain of the Empire on which the sun never set.

Timidly at first but with growing confidence Neville found himself accepted into this community, and found, moreover, that he was accepted with at least an outward show of pleasure. If every society reluctantly makes certain laws for its own well-being, the society of *pension* and spa hotel does so with a certain rigour and punishes by exile or coldness those who offend their code. And not the least of these is to grant to each member his moments of attention so that none need feel himself a bore or an outcast. For each in turn the wordy sympathy with ailment, the interested listening to tales of the past, the measure of self-importance which is necessary to us all. And for Neville, who had never had friends, who had been conscious in England of the polite but profound indifference of his acquaintances to his good or ill, even to his continued existence or death, there was sweetness in having an occasional audience. To describe his Surrey home and find that a question or two prolonged his description, to mention his married sister and her only child and be asked whether by chance he had a photograph of them, gave him joy. And when even his vegetarianism was pitied rather than derided, he began to feel that he should have discovered the Hotel Sarriá many years earlier.

It was the Colonial who first mentioned bull-fighting to

Neville, for he alone of the hotel guests disappeared after lunch on Sundays to take his place on the shady side of the bull-ring. Neville had already turned white when he had seen the gory posters announcing that six bulls from such and such a ranch would be killed by three *matadores* whose names were printed in letters larger than those used for the most fashionable film stars in England. He had seen a lurid picture of one bull-fighter in action, blood spurting in extravagant jets from the bull's wound as the little silk-clad hero thrust in the sword. He had reflected that nothing could be more revolting to his nature than bull-fighting. And he had always attempted to avoid hearing the off-hand recitals with which the Colonial entertained the other guests on Sunday evenings.

But the time came when he found himself alone in the lounge with this Martín on a day of great triumph for a popular *torero*.

'A wonderful afternoon,' Martín said gloatingly as he sipped his sherry. 'And they carried Antonio Caro through the city afterwards. Magnificent bulls, too. Just as Lalanda was going to dispatch his second ... But what is the matter, my friend?'

'I really don't like bull-fighting,' muttered Neville.

'But have you ever seen it?'

'No. No. I couldn't. I shouldn't wish to.'

'There's logic! You don't like it, but you haven't seen it. I suppose you think it's cruel? I thought so. Most foreigners have that conception. The horse, perhaps? But the horses are padded, my dear friend, and it is very seldom nowadays that you see one gored. Besides even if such a thing did happen you would be saved the embarrassment of other days when the horses could be heard to scream. A simple operation now on their vocal chords. ...'

'I'm afraid I must ask you to excuse me. I'm not feeling well. ...'

'I'm sorry. Allow me to accompany you. That lunch to-day ... but then you did not eat the cutlet, did you?'

Neville almost ran into the patio. Green-faced and gasping he stood clutching at a wrought-iron gate. When Martín followed him out, voicing his anxiety and sympathy, Neville begged him to leave him alone.

'I shall be all right,' he said. 'Please, please go back. I am accustomed to these turns.'

Only when he saw the colour returning slowly to Neville's cheeks did the Spaniard agree to leave him.

After he had gone Neville walked silently out into the street and then hurried along under the trees. He did not know where to go – he felt certain only that he must escape Martín. He would never again listen to such foul, such vilely sickening talk. He would avoid his hotel on every Sunday evening from to-day. He would withdraw himself if necessary from all the guests. As a last resort he would have to leave Spain and the pleasant sociability of the Hotel Sarría, rather than again be nauseated by descriptions of bull-fighting.

This proved unnecessary. Martín, he gathered, had not associated Neville's abrupt departure with the topic of their discussion, but for several days there was no reference to the bull-ring and the little circle which met in the lounge to wait interminably for dinner and discuss the weather, the price of clothes, the Government and an occasional wedding or funeral, seemed amiable to Neville, seemed to consist of the nicest and most friendly people he had ever met. He settled down again to bask in the sunlight, to read Proust and to enjoy the view of Tibidabo.

One evening, however, Martín suggested that they should go together to the centre of Barcelona, take a stroll through the Ramblas, drink a coffee, perhaps, and enjoy the cool night air. Pleased at the invitation to share the evening of another man, and particularly of another man so worldly and self-assured as Martín, Neville went up to his room to fetch the light-weight black hat, a comfortable, shapely and most un-English thing made by Borsalino, which he had audaciously purchased a few days earlier. The two sauntered

out like experienced *boulevardiers* and reached the Ramblas before midnight when that bright parading place was growing most populous. The summer night was scented, cafés and theatres threw their dazzling light on the trees which lined the central promenade, and talkative groups moved up and down at an easy pace. It was elegant and lively and Neville felt young and rather daring.

When Martín suggested that they should have a drink in one of the cafés he agreed willingly, and they were soon seated before a marble-topped table sipping Fundador, a Spanish brandy which Neville considered excellent.

A young man entered, and waved his hand casually to Martín. Neville, in a mood to idealize everything he saw, decided that he was exceedingly handsome. He had the close ringlets of hair, the straight nose and arrogantly curled lips which Neville believed typical of Spain, but his build was more muscular, his movements more decisive than those of most of the youths who paraded outside. There was something almost excessively virile about him, in spite of his grace and occasional languor, something in his resonant husky voice and hard disdainful eyes which perplexed Neville and rather troubled him. A boxer, perhaps? An actor? A rich idler? Impossible to guess. It was certain only that he was accustomed to getting his own way and was probably, thought Neville not without relish, lazily successful with women.

He joined the two of them and to Neville's surprise became instantly attentive to himself, friendly, rather respectful, interested. Impossible not to feel flattered by this; impossible not to talk, even to preen himself a little, in the warmth of this remarkable youth's regard. After another brandy Neville began to chatter with a gaiety, even a mild wittiness, which he had never known in himself. Martín scarcely spoke, seeming sardonically amused at the dry Englishman's enlivenment. It soon became obvious that the courtly young man and the stiff fifty-year-old liked one another, were happy in their meeting, were anxious to show

themselves to the best advantage. And when the Spaniard, who was called Ignacio, drew out his pocket-case to find and display the inevitable photograph of his sweetheart, it could be seen that the friendship was cemented.

Neville gazed respectfully at the portrait of a lovely brunette. Ah, yes, he thought a little morbidly, the handsome young man, the beautiful girl, the marriage of true minds and fine bodies, humanity in its prime. Unable to express his appreciation, he smiled and spoke compliments, feeling how empty were his adjectives. But the young man seemed delighted at his praise, pressed his arm and promised that he should meet his fiancée. Then with a grin to Martín he added that he had always supposed the English to be a cold-blooded race. The meeting of Neville and Ignacio was palpably a great success and Neville found himself committed to seeing the young man again on the next evening.

This, he reflected, was something more than the polite cordiality of the people in his hotel. Ignacio positively liked him. Inexplicably he had roused first Ignacio's curiosity about a foreigner, then his interest, and finally something akin to affection, until within an hour of their meeting they were friends. For Neville such a situation was wholly without precedent, but it was with pride and pleasure that he accompanied Martín to their hotel.

'That's a promising fellow,' said Martín. 'He has a great future before him.'

'Indeed?' This was better than Neville had supposed. If Ignacio, as well as a lover, a father-to-be of beautiful children, a handsome and cultivated gallant, were to have a great career, were to rise above his fellows, then he certainly transcended opinion and hope. 'What does he do?'

'But didn't you know? Didn't you realize who he was? He is one of our rising bull-fighters. Those who have seen him in the ring predict a marvellous future for him. He is quite without fear. And his style ... but you are not interested in bull-fighting.'

'No,' said Neville quickly. 'I am not.'

For the rest of the little journey he kept silent and once he saw Martín glancing at him with the pitying look which the healthy give to idiots or the blind. He muttered a curt good night and hurried to the locked privacy of his room.

That night he scarcely slept. He was harassed by ugly visions of Ignacio, his bloodstained fingers clutching a dripping sword, grinning over the corpse of a bull while deafening cheers rose from red-eyed watchers. The thought of a young man of such good-nature, of such gentleness and courtesy, making a career in this slaughter-house of a sport, this cruel and deathly display, was a torment to Neville. As the night went on his half-conscious dreaming grew more chimerical and sweating coldly he saw Ignacio himself in the sand, his side ripped open while the snorting bull advanced; he saw the little body gored and crippled while the hot spectators still cheered exultantly and dumb horses tried to neigh. Blood was in all his dreams, and the sickly smell of death, yet he could not dismiss from his tired mind the cool and smiling face of Ignacio, the honest friendliness in his eyes.

He sought no remedy, made no resolve. Even when he had slept uneasily for an hour or two before dawn and woken to the sunlit glory of a Spanish morning, he saw things no more clearly. That the first person in many years who had shown an unequivocal wish for his friendship should be engaged in this sordid, this revolting traffic, pained and angered him. But as to whether or not he would see Ignacio again he did not attempt to decide.

Perhaps he had been sure that he would do so. Perhaps once more he was attracted by what he most loathed. At all events the evening saw him again with the young *torero*, and in the weeks that followed they were frequently together.

For each of them the situation was unusual, and not in every way welcome. Ignacio had his following, the circle, half predatory, half devoted, which is to be found round every young bull-fighter – creatures who live parasitically

on his bounty, ambitious youths who hope to emulate his career, practised veterans who are glad to work for him in the ring and out of it to flatter, advise and warn him, or to pimp for him, or to act as his bodyguard. Ignacio's friends were at first incredulous and later resentful at the sight of the prim Englishman in conversation with their carefree hero. Ignacio himself had outgrown the respectfulness which had been in his manner on the first evening and now treated Neville with affectionate condescension, calling him '*inglés*', ragging him a little in front of his friends, but remaining pleased and flattered by the older man's interest, and taking pride in the novelty of having a middle-aged foreign '*fan*' among his devotees. Neville, doing his utmost to forget or at least to forgive Ignacio's sinister calling, remained enchanted by the young Spaniard himself, in whom he saw Latin manhood idealized, who was for him the symbol of perfection which his classical studies had once postulated. And when at last Ignacio did in fact present him, with a certain shy pomposity, to the girl he intended to marry, and Neville saw the splendid pair together and thought that in doing so he was seeing mankind at its best, he found that his acquaintance had changed his own nature. A self-confidence which at moments was almost rakish was transforming him into a man of the world, a tanned and travelled hedonist who would never again be satisfied with Surrey and a seaside holiday.

Ignacio had not realized the extremity of Neville's squeamishness but had accepted his distaste for bull-fighting as one of the freakish blind spots to be expected in a foreigner. He was amused and perhaps not displeased that Neville should find him in himself admirable while remaining indifferent to his achievements in his spectacular career. But when the time of his first important appearance in Barcelona approached he began to rally Neville affectionately about it.

'So you are not coming to see me, *inglés*?'

'No, no. I'm afraid I couldn't do that. I shouldn't like it, you know.'

Ignacio stared at him, smiling fondly at such a prodigy. But he made no attempt to persuade him.

'The *inglés*,' he told the gathering of his friends that evening when Neville was among them; 'The *inglés* is going to the chapel with the women when I am in the ring on Sunday!'

The laughter which followed this was not all as good-natured as Ignacio's. Neville blinked a little uncomfortably, and felt suddenly old and out of place among these raucous fellows whose lives were dedicated to a pursuit so foreign to his own quiet tastes. As though he divined his friend's discomfort, Ignacio drew him aside.

'Will you really come to the chapel? There is a chapel under every bull-ring. You could go with my family. I should be so pleased, *inglesito*!'

For a swift moment Neville thought of his home, of his staunchly Protestant parents, of his sister who was strict and uncompromising in her English puritanism, and wondered what they would say if they could see him now, wearing a Spanish suit of tropical cloth, standing among a group of bull-fighters' touts with the arm of their chief about his shoulder, listening to an urgent invitation to the chapel in the bull-ring where the womenfolk of each *torero* knelt to say their *aves* while their son or husband, brother or lover, risked his life. He, Neville, who had with such feeling condemned the mildest of blood-sports, who had considered all foreign places exotic and forbidding, who had thought of the Catholic church as an institution both un-English and idolatrous, he, Neville, gravely nodding and accepting the offer.

'Yes, Ignacio. I'll come. As long as you don't ask me to watch, I will certainly pray.'

His little biblical joke had no meaning for the bull-fighter who was just then summoned to join his friends. Neville saw him no more that evening, but went home happier than he had been since he had realized that Ignacio's appearance in the ring was at hand.

Sunday afternoon found him among several thousand people scrambling towards the bull-ring. He had been told that a Spanish crowd is a frightening thing and frightening was the first word he would have applied to this gabbling mass of pleasure-seekers. The sweet-vendors whose hoarse voices seemed to threaten rather than cajole, the clutching beggars, the dark and menacing gypsies demanding alms, the deafening noise and the absence of laughter – a notable point of difference from the crowds of England – combined to intensify the nightmare. Neville was jostled and accosted, his clothes made dusty and his feet trampled in that scrimmage. The sun scorched his eyes and the dust parched his throat. Then as he neared the bull-ring itself the din became ear-splitting, the beggars gripped his sleeves and the smells of horseflesh and humanity warred with those of garlic and burnt pea-nuts. But stronger than his repugnance and trepidation was his sense of guilt, which the clamour and dark sensual faces about him seemed only to heighten. He was countenancing this villainy, he was one with these turbulent unsmiling people whose hearts were set on slaughter, he had choked back his own queasiness. And why? Because a dark-skinned braggart with a luscious girl on his arm had bade him spend the time of his heroics on his knees. What grotesquerie, what silliness was this? Was he a boy to run to such beckoning? Was he a sentimental old man? No, damn it, at fifty he should be at his strongest in will and intellect. He should, in a word, in his parents' words, know better.

A moment later he was presenting the slip of paper which Ignacio had given him to a door-keeper and asking the way. And before the roar of the spectators greeted the first bull of the afternoon he had walked stiffly, with unbowed head, to an obscure place in the chapel, and begun to look about him.

His reflections were muddled and unhappy. This dingy cavern, lit only by the red spark of the sanctuary lamp and a few candles burning before an altar, was no refuge for him. It was foreign and mysterious and the shuffle of feet

overhead and the rising and falling waves of the crowd's bawling outside left him no repose. And when he saw that the painted figure on a huge crucifix above the altar had been carved with such verisimilitude that the blood was shown gushing from the wounds, he thought that even the religion of Spain was a sanguinary thing and that the women whose bowed heads he saw about him said fierce or melancholy prayers.

But presently the mother of Ignacio crept in with Emilia, the girl whom he was to marry in a few months' time, and the old woman stooped to whisper to Neville that Ignacio's first bull was about to enter. Then he found himself more than ever distressed and dubious. He could hear the surging bellows of the crowd, followed by a sudden silence, then shouts again and a deafening chorus of 'Olé!'. He tried not to imagine the scene, tried not to think of man, horses or bull, but to pray objectively for the life and well-being of his friend without considering the occasion of his danger. He found that his hands were gripping the chair in front of him, that his forehead was wet and cold, that he was staring at the crucifix before him as though he dare not see anything else. The yells outside seemed to reach a climax, then die away into hand-clapping and lesser shouts, and when Ignacio's mother rose smiling to say – 'All is well' and leave him, he knew that Ignacio's first bull was dead.

But he knew also that Ignacio must kill another bull later in the *corrida*. He could not, he decided, stay in the chapel any longer. As soon as the two women had left him he grabbed his black hat and almost ran out of the semi-darkness through the cool tunnel under the stone tiers and into the sunshine and the deserted street. 'Never again,' he kept telling himself, fatuously. 'Never, never again.' It had been the most tense and emotional afternoon of his life.

Evening brought the blessed coolness and the smell of flowers which makes the Mediterranean summer night so welcome. After he had dined and sipped his Valdepeñas and lit a mild cheroot with his coffee, he was inclined to look

PAINTINGS



FRANCIS BACON: Head, 1949 (Oil) (*Hanover Gallery*)



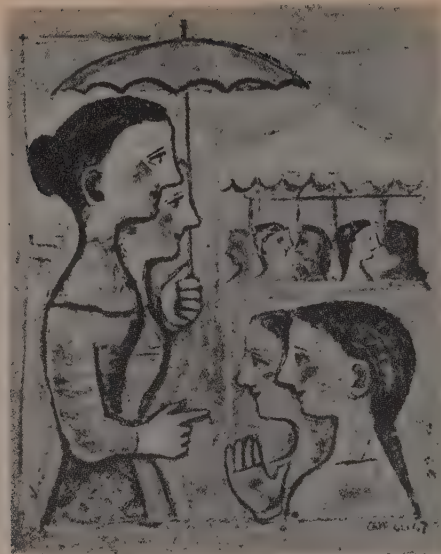
EDWARD BURRA : Irish Street Scene, 1948 (*Watercolour*)
(*Leicester Galleries*)



EDWARD BURRA : Limbo, 1948-9 (*Watercolour*)
(*Leicester Galleries*)



EDWARD BURRA : Procession, 1948 (*Watercolour*)
(*Leicester Galleries*)



·MASSIMO CAMPIGLI: Amusement Park
(*St George's Gallery*)



MASSIMO CAMPIGLI: The Stairs (*St George's Gallery*)



MASSIMO CAMPIGLI: *The Necklace*
(*St George's Gallery*)



KEITH VAUGHAN : *The Raft*, 1948 (Oil) (*Lefevre Gallery*)



KEITH VAUGHAN : *Oyster Fishermen*, 1948 (*Gouache*) (*Lefevre Gallery*)



KEITH VAUGHAN: *Elegiac Figure*, 1948 (*Oil*)
(*Redfern Gallery*)



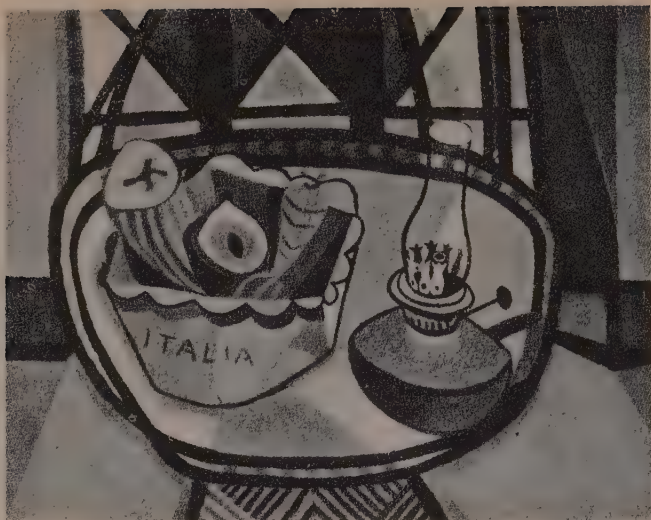
WYNDHAM LEWIS: Woman with Red Tam o' Shanter, 1921



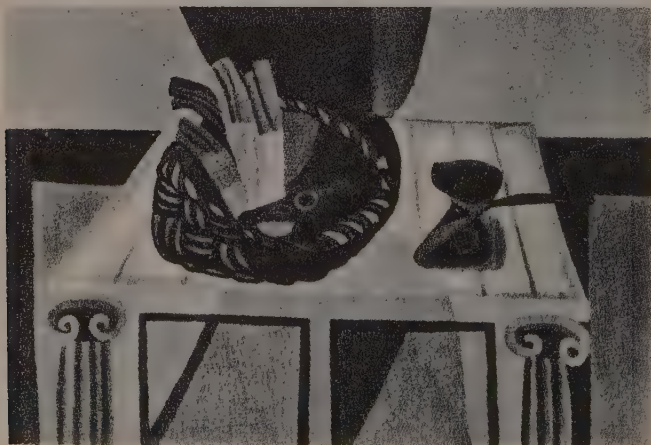
WYNDHAM LEWIS: The Convalescent, 1933 (Oil)
(Redfern Gallery)



ROBERT COLQUHOUN: Woman and Goat, 1948 (*Oil*)
(*Lefevre Gallery*)



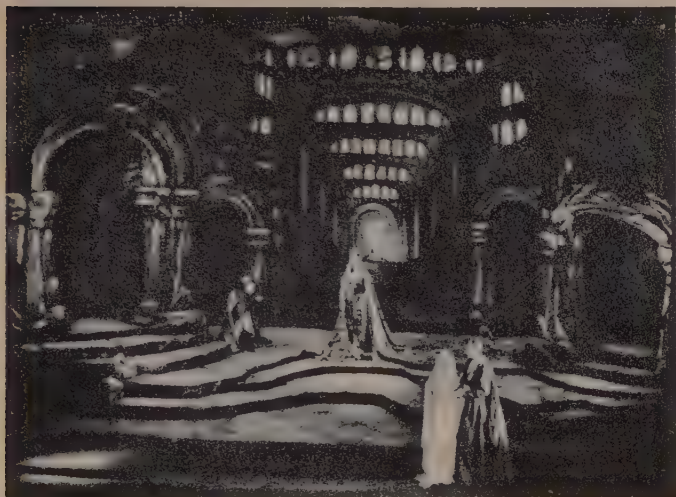
ROBERT MCBRYDE: Table in a Red Room (*Oil*)



ROBERT MCBRYDE: Wicker Basket and Coffee Pot (*Oil*)
(*Lefevre Gallery*)

SHAKESPEARE AT STRATFORD-ON-AVON 1949

(Stage photographs by McBean)



Cymbeline : Production by Michael Benthall—Decor by Leslie Hurry



Macbeth : Production by Anthony Quayle



Much Ado About Nothing : Production by John Gielgud



Much Ado About Nothing : The Masked Dance



Mariano Andreu's convertible set showing exterior (*left*) and interior (*right*)



A Midsummer Night's Dream : Production by Michael Benthall
Decor and costumes by James Bailey



JAMES BAILEY: Design for Oberon's costume



EDWARD CARRICK: Costume design for Lady Macbeth

back blandly on the stresses of the afternoon, and when Martín sauntered up and invited him again to visit the central city, he did not refuse.

'We must go and congratulate young Ignacio,' said Martín. 'He has had a great success to-day, a tremendous ovation. You have heard?'

'No,' said Neville. 'I have not heard.'

'Of course, you're not interested in bull-fighting. I always forget. But you must surely be glad of his triumph.'

Neville made no answer. Indeed he scarcely knew if he could affirm or deny the statement. He asked for no details and in a moment he had changed the subject.

In a private room of his hotel Ignacio, surrounded by his friends and his following, their families and satellites, sat at the head of a long table from which the food had not long been cleared and on which were coffee cups and several bottles of brandy. The air was thick with smoke, but Ignacio saw Neville enter and at once shouted a greeting. Then, picking up something from the table before him, he flung it to Neville with a careless 'Take it, friend!'

Neville instinctively thrust out his hands to catch it, and as he did so, in the second during which the thing spun down the length of the room, he realized that there was silence and that everyone was watching him.

His hands caught whatever Ignacio had thrown, but with a cry of horror he flung it from him. He had not identified it; something obscene, bloodstained, hairy. A dead rat? A piece of raw pigin? What filth, what insult was here?

The room was suddenly in turmoil. A huge Spaniard was shouting into Neville's face - '*Animal! Animal!*' he yelled fiercely. They were all gesticulating at him, abusing him, openly threatening him. He looked in bewildered appeal towards Ignacio.

Ignacio was on his feet. There was an expression in his face which Neville had never seen. Outraged pride? Pain? The desire for drama?

'*Bueno, Inglés,*' he said, and the name had not the friendly

bantering ring that it had always had. 'Since you don't like my present I will give you a more conventional one.'

His voice had hushed the room and even in that perplexed, unhappy moment Neville knew that Ignacio was acting, that melodrama was demanded by his friends and that he was determined not to disappoint them, but that his acting came also from some high-pitched but sincere emotion.

With a gesture which was slightly exaggerated and a grimace that was only half natural, Ignacio tore from his wrist a gold bracelet with a small disc on it, an ornament such as most Spaniards carry in commemoration of their first communion or baptism. And before Neville could protest or seek an explanation of these histrionics he had thrust it into his hand.

Everyone started to speak again and Neville became aware of Martín desperately signing to him to follow. Bleakly he joined him in the doorway.

'Didn't you understand? It was the ear that he gave you. The greatest honour. Oh, but you should have understood. When a *torero* distinguishes himself highly the crowd will wave their handkerchiefs and shout until the president of the *corrida* orders that he shall be presented with the ear of the bull he has killed. It is a very big honour, and it fell to Ignacio to-day. I should have told you. Oh, my God, my God, of course I should have told you!'

Martín was almost in tears.

'It was his first big bull-fight and he gained this honour, and he gave it to you! Don't you understand? He was giving the ear to you! And you threw it ... Oh, my God! Come back to the hotel, my English friend. It isn't your fault. You didn't understand. But those fellows inside there, Ignacio's friends, are capable of anything. You must come with me at once!'

Meekly, still frowning in uncertainty, Neville did as he was told. And next morning, having obtained a passage on a home-bound plane, he proceeded carefully to pack his bags. He gave his tropical suit and Borsalino hat to the hotel porter before he left for home.

Edward Bolton

SWALED ALE

At the first shine and april falling
miracle of stone on the islands of the waterweeds,
the hillside silence walking warning over them
and the moorland moving like a parable among
the blue fortnight at the beginning of the summer dales,
the birds, the winds, falling like cups through the morning
veils,

I walk alone in the mindseye golden distance,
and watch the days dancing on the altarstones.

At the first round and truly friendly
psalm of the choir in that seeming chapter of all worlds,
that dairy-yellow and lamb-bracken valley of all praise
by the chaffinch wood lifting his random eras
of song and gold up to the gorsese side furthest hill,
my heart, that was once a sunset winter marble,
walks and enjoys the temperate sunlit rounds,
the mortar sun building through the steppingstones.

No world shall pluck this solitary
herbmind, heavengrace, cupped, from these waterweeds;
the cool-garnish, quail-quiet of this island reverie
one springtime only walked through the mountain curlew
and all the charm sifted of the benison birds.
All my life I shall hold, graced through the southward cities,
one sunbuilt moment of a northern Spring
where all the world was silence, and I as calm as young.

Chun-Chan Yeh

THREE BROTHERS

‘Shall we make some tea?’ Law-ta, the elder brother said to Law-yi, the younger one, and stretched his arms in a yawn. ‘It’s so cold to-night. My feet are frozen.’

‘The same with mine,’ Law-yi agreed. ‘The charcoal in the brazier is dying out. Do make some tea.’

The elder brother went into the kitchen, and put the kettle on the fire. Meanwhile Law-yi rubbed his sleepy eyes, let out a sigh of fatigue, and then went on with his calculation on the abacus. The balls clattered on the wires like pearls on a silver tray, brittle and crisp, producing the effect of music. The tempo of the music grew faster as the movement of his fingers increased in speed. In a minute he forgot his fatigue and his eyes shone with fresh energy as though he had just had a restoring, comfortable sleep. The impressive figures on the ancient counting machine inspired him.

He was doing the final accounts of the profits his and his brother’s joint shop had made during the past eleven months.

After a little while Law-ta emerged from the kitchen. He placed two bell-shaped blue cups on the table, each of which contained a dozen flat, long, green tea-leaves. Then he poured the hot water into them, and the leaves came up on the surface, and unfolded themselves gently and softly until they became so green and fat and heavy that they staggered and went down to the bottom of the cups. There they remained at rest, sending up a fresh scent of tea blossoms in spring drizzles and dew on blue mountains. The elder brother drew a deep breath at the ascending vapour, and shut his eyes in a state of semi-ecstasy. He admired the tea, and enjoyed smelling it.

The younger brother stopped counting all of a sudden,

infected by the same scent. He also closed his eyes, and fell into a state of peaceful coma.

This was the delicious moment they had of late discovered in life. It gave them complete rest during the intervals of strenuous work, and brought them to a different plane. Twenty years earlier they were the starved children of a destitute strolling player, who entertained the lonely trackers on the bamboo flotillas sailing up and down the wild river. They had no home, not even a home town, for they were born on a wrecked raft. The father had earned a scanty living by making stupid faces and croaking obscene songs all his life till one day he suddenly fell on a piece of rug, lifeless and penniless, on a desolate sandy beach. He went to join his wife, who had died of hardship and worries in the previous year. His last words to his three sons, then ranging from fifteen to eight, was that they should try to learn more useful and practical trades and settle down somewhere peacefully, and should never bother, or even think, about the cold river. After ten years of wandering about, changing from one job to another, the two elder brothers finally managed to scrape together enough money to set up a vegetable stall in the market place of this little walled village town. By sheer industry and hard work the stall developed into a shop and the shop grew into a 'joint firm', selling 'everything within the Four Seas', i.e. salt as well as matches. As 'the richest merchants of the town', they could now sit quietly, in the dead of night, to enjoy the greenish, scented tea like aristocrats, ignoring the cold stars and moon and the merciless chilly air on the river.

The perfumed vapour on the cups gradually subsided. The two brothers slowly opened their eyes and contemplated the green leaves dreamily. It was when their lips touched the warm drink that their minds returned to the real world of business.

'What is the result?' the elder brother asked.

'Not yet completed,' Law-yi answered. 'But the figures so far show a net profit of about one hundred and fifty dollars.'

'Good!' Law-ta exclaimed. And he took another sip of tea and fell into a meditative silence again. A series of visions fled past his eyes, now rendered hazy by the guttering oil lamp: a big house in the country somewhere outside the town, with an orchard at the back and a kitchen on the right, and a penthouse on the left, where lived the gardener and his wife, who might also be employed as a cook; the mistress of the house should be a plump woman with a fairly large behind so that she looked like a mother and commanded respect and authority among the children as well as the servants. The children would be educated into real aristocrats, with all the traces of the river player and even those of the shopkeeper completely erased from their memory.

While the elder brother was indulging in these dreams, Law-yi resumed his work on the ancient counting machine in the company of a pile of ledgers. His fingers moved on the balls from one end of the abacus to another with such dexterity and speed that they looked as though flying. But his mind was working on a visionary picture too. He was dreaming of the day when he and his brother would both be married. Then he would split the shop, for Law-ta was a man of rather philosophical, retiring, slightly nervous temperament, too readily contented with the *status quo*. He would set up a separate shop of his own, open branches in other village towns, and possibly also build a factory to press oil and buy a flotilla to transport his own goods.

These two streams of fantasies were suddenly snapped short by the announcement of the advance of night the watchman made with a gong. The old brass rang first faintly and then very distinctly on the city wall, intensifying the silence characteristic of midnight. All were in bed except for the poor old watchman and these two hard-working brothers. So sound were people asleep that not even a snore was heard. The little town itself seemed to be dreaming too. Through some queer agitation in him the elder brother felt strangely wakeful. He did not even want to yawn.

Perhaps the fresh green tea had a bracing effect on his nerves. To the amazement of his younger brother, he muttered the name of Buddha, 'Ametafa, Ametafa ...' This was a queer habit he had unconsciously acquired from his mother, who used to do the same thing when she and her children were starved. This invocation, however, now only represented the mood in which he did not feel much like sleeping.

Then as abruptly as he had invoked the name of the Saviour, he tiptoed to the top floor, leaving Law-yi to his ledgers and abacus. He stood by the little window, silently and attentively as though he were listening to the fall of frost. Then, with trembling hands, he pulled the two leaves of the window-door open. There outside, what a beautiful moonlit winter night! He put his head out and looked to the right and then to the left. Frost was indeed falling. He could see the tiled roofs glimmering in the moon like fish scales. Farther in the distance he could see the river flashing like a white silk ribbon against the opaque sky. The sand on the beach glittered like innumerable stars. Unexpectedly he felt a twinge at his heart: he suddenly remembered his childhood when his mother used to nestle the three of them on her bosom against the cold under a shabby portable shed on a very similar beach. This memory now grew so vivid in his mind against the present background that he could no longer stand it. Quickly he shut the window and, with timid steps, went down to the office on the ground floor.

The younger brother was still busy with his figures, head hanging, casting an innocent shadow on the wall.

'Haven't you finished it yet, eh?' Law-ta asked with an affected silly giggle. He was trying to say something in order to forget about their childhood and the youngest brother.

'I have just a little more to cover,' Law-yi replied. 'However, we'll go to bed by the next watch in any case.'

The elder brother sat by the table, quietly waiting. Time seemed to pass very slowly. Hours went by, but the gong for the next watch did not come up. Possibly the watchman

was trapped by slumber or enmeshed in a nightmare. Feeling rather bored, Law-ta fastened his eyes on the younger brother, studying his tightly sealed lips, serious eyebrows, broad forehead and prominent nose. These familiar features, which he had watched develop into a man's during the period he took charge of his two younger brothers after their father's death, again brought him back to his early days. And, curiously enough, the more he looked at them, the more he thought of the youngest brother, of whose whereabouts he had not the faintest idea.

'Law-yi!' at last he could not contain himself in silence. 'Where do you think our Law-san can be at the moment?'

The industrious younger brother stopped his fingers on the abacus and raised his frowning eyebrows to look at Law-ta, wondering what on earth made him think of that lost man at this particular hour. 'Somewhere on the beach entertaining the stupid trackers, I guess.' Then he lowered his head and plunged into his work again. After a moment, however, he changed his mind, adding, 'Oh, no, he must be sleeping somewhere on a heap of hay with his Bohemian comrades.'

These words unintentionally brought prickling pains to the fatherly heart of the elder brother. He could not speak a word.

The youngest brother was in every way unlike these two, by some queer arrangement of hereditary cells in his blood. While a child on the wild river he had a great passion for the rough spectacles and side-splitting jokes of his father and other hairy and haggard players, who wandered like gypsies from one end of the wild river to the other, entertaining the lonely coolies on the flotillas. When he grew up he made up his mind to be one of them. He was as head-strong in his 'artistic' pursuit as Law-yi in his business. When the two elder brothers tried to persuade him to join the common business adventure he flatly refused, saying that he was not born a slave of money. The hard-boiled Law-yi, furious at the contemptuous remark, said to him,

'Off you go!' And really off he went, without a minute's hesitation.

Two days earlier, however, the lost young man had suddenly turned up in the shop. He was pale and thin, with long hair and a ridiculously small, yellowish beard. He had the appearance of a poet rather than of a strolling player. This time, for once, he talked to his two elder brothers about business. He had heard that they were very prosperous and that they were thinking of getting married and settling down in nice country homes. He himself, too, wanted to get a wife, although he was not quite sure whether he would settle down or not.

'Then why don't you get a wife?' Law-ta asked, rather sympathetic towards the idea. 'It's good for you.'

'Here is the point,' the youngest brother said. 'I need some money. You know the artistic profession doesn't pay. ...'

'I quite understand. Well ... perhaps we ...'

'Wait a minute!' the second brother interrupted, turning to Law-san: 'Whom are you going to marry?'

'An actress, a singer, a beautiful woman.'

'You mean one of your wandering loafers?' The very idea of an 'artistic wife' infuriated Law-yi. 'You mean you are going to roam about together all your life and have children and leave them on the lonely sandy beach to the care of moon and stars? We had enough of it in our own childhood. Off you go, I say!'

Off the youngest brother went again, like the first time. He could not bear the 'materialistic, vulgar, insulting' words any more than the second brother could stand the thought of the homeless existence for the children on the merciless river. This time, however, they parted as enemies. They did not even say 'good-bye', let alone 'au revoir'.

The scene was now as vivid before the eldest brother's dreamy eyes as though it had happened just a moment ago. 'Ametafa, Ametafa!' he called the name of Buddha again.

No sooner had he finished his exclamation than a roar shot up in the street outside. It was as loud as spring

thunder. The second brother, instinctively nervous about the safety of his treasure, jumped up from his seat and, hugging the ledgers under his arms, dashed straight off upstairs. Law-ta, having moved the heavy writing table to the front door in order to reinforce it, also hurried to the garret. Carefully they pulled the small window half-open and peeped out. A group of people with masks on their eyes was pouring into the street through the city gate, which, to the astonishment of the two brothers, was wide open.

'That's why the second watch has never sounded,' the elder brother whispered, his teeth chattering. 'The poor old watchman has probably been throttled to death by a large gag. The agents of the robbers must have filtered into the city before dark and hidden themselves somewhere, possibly near the watch tower.'

'Don't talk nonsense!' the younger brother cautioned him. 'They are coming here to rob us. They know that we have made some profit this year. They also know that as our business has just been closed for the New Year our cash must still be in the shop. They want to take this money. They want to deprive us of our future families we have been dreaming about. Let's climb on the roof and defend ourselves.'

These sober words brought home to the elder brother the seriousness of the situation. He was frightened. But the picture of his future home with an orchard and a kitchen garden and a penthouse kept his mind in balance. He followed his younger brother and climbed on the roof and hid behind the parapet that had been built for eventualities like this when the shop began to yield a profit.

The robbers were not many, fifteen or sixteen at most. And they were not armed with efficient guns. They had only some old-fashioned spears and swords and one or two blunderbusses, which probably could never fire. The moon brought their silhouettes to view. They did not look ferocious, either, although their joint roar sounded rather threatening. They jumped up and down the street, hooting

like ghosts. Some of them shook the doors of many shops, but their efforts proved futile. Those doors were as a rule very strong and tightly fastened at night and probably reinforced with heavy tables like that of the two brothers' shop. It needed giants to break them.

The two brothers, perched quietly on the roof, regained their self-confidence from the failure of the robbers' attempts. But before long their nerves were pitched to high tension again. The attackers had located their shop and were now converging on the door. They had found a large, long, rectangular stone, and balanced it on two ropes. They swung it rhythmically and heavily to and fro against the door, producing a splitting echo on the wood. Each echo brought a spell of cold sweat on the backs of the two brothers. Their enterprise, their future, their lives were now at stake. It had taken them fifteen years to arrive at their present station, and yet a quarter of an hour seemed quite enough to destroy every achievement.

The elder brother had a new idea, inspired by sheer desperation. He remembered the stock of lime powder, which he had stored up to meet the necessity of building a new extension to the old premises. He hurried down to the storeroom and carried up two large basketfuls of the dry, caustic powder. As the assailants were storming the door with all their might and attention, with rhythm and in unison, the two brothers suddenly poured the fine lime over their heads from above. A whitish cloud, smelling suffocatingly, immediately rose roof-high, enveloping all the robbers like a smoke screen. The hollow echo on the door came to an abrupt stop as though by magic. Fitful muffled coughs disturbed the sudden silence. The robbers were not only stifled, but blinded by the dry powder. Like a nest of hornets stirred up by a gust of cyclone they stampeded in confusion into various directions. But they did not give up their attempt. They were still hooting frightfully. They even threatened that they would behead the mischief-doers on the roof when they got into the shop – a task

which, they swore, would not take more than half an hour to accomplish.

The cloud of the powder began to subside gradually, bringing the door more clearly to view. The robbers assembled on the spot again. This time they were in more belligerent spirits. The suffocation they had experienced fanned up their fire of anger and resentment. It was not only the fortune they were striving to capture, but also the 'injustice' for which they must revenge themselves. Some of them actually shouted to the 'cowards' on the roof that when they got into the shop they would half-boil them in the rice pot before they cut off their heads. But how they would boil two big human beings in the rice pot, they left the brothers to guess. Others were shaking their fists in the air to show how they would beat the two brothers, who 'had such wicked hearts as to resort to the poison powder for a weapon!'

Among the robbers there was a young man, who appeared to be very active and ingenious. He did not shout or shake his fist, but talked in quiet words to his comrades, as a commander to his army, as to what steps to take, what tactics to employ in order to force the door open. Law-yi had noticed that it was he who first spotted the shop and then organized the men for the attack. Now that the powder-screen was cleared, this fellow was again directing the assault. He was actually waving his arms to silence the men from empty threats and advising them to swing the stone for renewed attacks. Law-yi followed the young robber's movement with vigilant, fearful eyes. Before the elder brother had time enough to bring up another two basketfuls of lime, he quietly detached a brick from the parapet and waited for a chance to tackle the young organizer.

The door below began to groan. Its giving way was now really a matter of minutes. The assailants had also realized that. While the pounding of their stone on the door increased its tempo, their muscles moved with such ease and rhythm that they seemed as though working on a gold mine

instead of robbing a shop. They were now so sure of their victory that they even tuned up a little song in chorus – a song about a young widow longing for a new husband. The active young robber, who had been directing the attack, emerged from the porch and took a seat on an empty cigarette stall for a puff of smoke, waiting complacently for his tactics to bear fruit. The younger brother on the roof cocked his right eye on him. Just when the young tactician was about to light his pipe he lowered the brick, which fell right on the middle of the young organizer's head. The leader of the robbers rolled on to the pavement like a dead log. He was unconscious.

The singing attackers discovered the incident in an instant. They gave up their job, with much regret, and crowded together over the wounded leader. But nothing they could do succeeded in bringing him back to consciousness. They had no first-aid. They had not even a place to heat a little water to wet the wounded man's throat. Meanwhile cocks were crowing in the distance announcing the approach of dawn. To increase their consternation, the two brothers, now encouraged by their success, began to rain a shower of tiles over the frustrated robbers. Many of them had their noses cut or ears slashed or skull broken. In the end they had to pick up their leader and took to their heels for life.

The two brothers descended to the office downstairs. The teacups still stood by the abacus as though nothing had happened. The elder brother stared at them stupidly, his thick lips puckered up like a snout.

'So the robbers are gone,' he said at last, breaking the silence. 'The whole thing seems a queer dream.'

'It isn't a queer dream,' the younger brother answered. 'It's a reality. Our fortune and future, the fruit of our years' labour and everything have escaped total destruction only by a hair's breadth.'

The elder brother did not say anything more, but heaved a gentle sigh. This unnecessary expression of disappointment aroused Law-yi's curiosity.

'What did you sigh for, Law-ta,' he asked, 'now that we are safe and secure here?'

'I sigh for our future and fortune.'

'I don't understand you.'

'I'm just having a strange thought. I wonder if it would be happier for us without a fortune.'

The younger brother understood what Law-ta meant, so he did not make any comment. He simply said, 'But our parents were always threatened by starvation.'

'But we shall never be, even though we may have no fortune.'

'Well. ...'

The moo of a cow somewhere in the distance interrupted the younger brother. The day was breaking. Some industrious peasants in the country nearby had already got up and let out their animals. This made the two brothers realize that the night watchman had so far forgotten to beat his gong. Perhaps he had been murdered in cold blood by the robbers. The elder brother could not help shivering at the thought.

'Poor old man!' he murmured to himself all of a sudden as though he had seen his blood-stained body. 'He had such a kind, harmless face.'

'What do you mean?' the younger brother asked with curiosity. 'Are you talking to a ghost?'

'I mean our night watchman. He had nothing in the world but an old pipe. Everything else, the watch tower, his straw bed and the little stool he used to sit on in the sun, belong to the town. Why should he be murdered?'

'Don't talk of dreams,' the younger brother said. 'How can you say that he was murdered when you haven't seen him? If he were really throttled to death by a large gag, then it's just an unfortunate accident which you and I simply cannot help.'

'We could have helped it,' Law-ta said seriously as though he himself were the murderer. 'If we had not made such a profit during the past year, no one would have come

here to bother about him. He was killed simply because of our fortune.'

'Don't be silly,' Law-yi said, trying to stabilize his brother's nerves. 'Death is just an unfortunate accident. For instance, if the brick, which I dropped on the head of the young robber, did kill him, it's just another accident. It simply happened to be so. I did not plan it three months ahead.'

'What? You dropped a brick on the head of that very active young fellow? His criminal action apart, he seemed a nice chap with some future.'

'You've become unnecessarily sentimental, Brother. Of course I threw a brick on the top of his head when he was lighting his pipe to enjoy a smoke.'

'Then you are a murderer!' the elder brother shouted with self-imposed terror. 'None of our family have ever murdered a man alive. Did he shed much blood? Did you ever see any blood gushing out of his fractured head?'

'Don't get excited and imagine things, Brother. It's not a man, but a robber, and a strange robber at that. You've never seen his face. I've never seen his face. Why should we bother about him?'

The elder brother somehow grew nervous in spite of the younger brother's pacifying words. He visualized the ghastly picture in which a murdered human being, once very lively and active, lay in cold blood, dead like a rat crushed by the wheels of a heavy car.

He actually shook in his shoes as the picture of his imagined corpse grew larger and larger before his delirious eyes. His legs trembled so much that they nearly gave way.

'I wonder if it is worth while to keep our fortune,' he murmured absent-mindedly after having made some efforts to steady himself.

Law-yi did not understand what his brother really meant. So he remained silent, but stared at Law-ta's wooden face with confusion.

'If our youngest brother comes to us for help again,' the

elder brother went on, still absent-mindedly, 'we had better give him at least one-third of our wealth so that he is as comfortable as we are, so that he can marry the woman he loves, so that he may even give occasional feasts to his vagabond comrades. They must appreciate and enjoy good meals as we did in our younger days. ...'

This kind of continual, senseless murmur was more than the younger brother could bear. He had never heard of such fantastic ideas. To put a stop to Law-ta's childish chattering, he said, raising his voice: 'You seem to be mad, Brother. You talk like an old woman.'

'Call me what you will,' he said. 'Somehow I suddenly feel an emptiness in life.'

Before the younger brother found suitable words to correct Law-ta's temperamental pessimism somebody suddenly knocked at the door. With surprise he discovered that it had already been dawn for some time. He beat off the lime powder from his gown and then went to open the door. It was the town crier who called. The old man put on a wry smile and congratulated the ingenious shopkeeper on the success of his tactics and fight against the robbers last night. But soon his wrinkled face grew long. He deplored the unhappy fact that the kind night watchman had been literally choked to death with a hard apple wrapped in a round, cotton-padded silk case. The old fellow further added, as a personal comment, that the robbers had probably had no intention of finishing off the miserable life of the watchman - after all, he was as poor as they. The robbers, he reasoned, had possibly thought that by the time they accomplished their wicked task the poor old watchman would have pushed his teeth through the silk pad right into the apple, and be able to crush the fruit and extract some sweet juice from it to wet his parched mouth as a compensation to his suffering. But alas! the town crier sighed, the poor old fellow had no such luck. That was why he died with his eyes open. 'It was an untimely death, so he could not close his eyes.'

‘Untimely death?’ the elder brother asked.

‘Exactly, as far as I can see,’ the town crier said, his voice reduced to the lowest pitch. For at the moment he suddenly felt that he and the old watchman were in the same boat, both in age and pay, although different in duties, one working in the day, the other at night. A kind of indescribable grief and loneliness overwhelmed him: who could say that the same fate might not fall on him one day? So the town crier went on, ‘Yes, untimely death. All for the protection of your property!’

No sooner had he let out the phrase of resentment than he became afraid. What he had said was absolutely seditious in nature. After all, it was upon people like these two brothers that he depended for his bread and butter. So he masked his long face with an artificial smile and said in a seemingly cheerful tone, ‘Never mind. The robbers paid for the old life with a young one. We’ve gained something that way.’

The younger brother was startled. ‘What do you mean?’ he asked.

‘I discovered the dead body of a young robber on the sandy beach early this morning,’ the town crier said quietly. ‘Apparently the beast was wounded so severely that he died shortly after his comrades had carried him out of the town. They left him there alone, condemned soul, and they themselves vanished into the mountains on the other side of the river.’

Both brothers became pale. The younger brother had convulsive waves passing through his heart. He suddenly realized that he *was* a murderer, the murderer of a very young life which he had been watching, quietly, from the top of the roof, jumping and leaping and even trying to have a puff at a pipe in the clear, frost-crispy moonlight like a warrior or a general in the midst of a busy campaign.

‘Let’s have a look at the dead body!’ he said in great haste, hoping against hope that the dead young man might not be his victim.

'Good!' the town crier said. 'Let's go!'

Both brothers followed the old man to the sandy beach. By the water where some wrecked parts of an old flotilla had been washed ashore, making a terrific mess, was gathered a crowd of people. The two brothers squeezed their way in. There, lying stiff on the sand, was the dead body of the young robber. The coroner, who was examining the body and could not identify it, as his face was disfigured except for a slender bunch of ridiculous hairs on the chin, had found an unfinished note on his bosom. It said:

My Dearest:

'At last I am determined to make a journey, a rather eventful journey, I expect. But I shall be helped by all our friends, who will be invited as the guests of honour to our wedding party; and I believe I shall be successful as I do not mean to harm anybody but to borrow the amount of money, which I feel I have some sentimental reason to entitle me to, necessary to celebrate the happiest day of our life ...'

After having read out the passage to the audience the coroner commented, 'A fine piece of romantic poetry, eh?' Then he looked around and asked, 'Is there anybody here who can identify the author or the woman he was going to marry?'

'Of course it is the dead young man who wrote it,' the town crier said senselessly. 'Look at that ridiculous bunch of sparse beard. Who else but a vagabond player of the river can write it?'

'I know that,' the coroner said. 'But I want to know who is this vagabond player.'

'Let me have a look at it,' Law-ta said, taking over the piece of paper from the old town crier.

While perusing the handwriting, the elder brother turned deadly pale. He recognized it. His hands began to shake, so violently that the note fell out from his fingers. Law-yi

picked it up and read it. He, too, turned pale. The old town crier did not fail to notice the change. He put out his hand and supported the younger brother by the shoulder so that the latter would not collapse.

The coroner became curious. 'Do you know this robber by any chance?' he asked the younger brother.

The younger brother did not seem to hear. He only muttered, wide of the mark: 'I murdered him. ... I murdered him in cold blood while he was trying to light a pipe. ...'

The coroner, puzzled by the incoherent words, turned to the elder brother and inquired, 'Do you by any chance know this fellow? You seem to have some old score to settle. Were you great enemies or hated relatives disputing over some inheritance?'

The elder brother stared at the questioner like a stranger for some time. Then he muttered, also wide of the mark, 'We've no inheritance to dispute over. All we got from our parents were three brothers, three strong brothers. But now one is dead ... dead. ... He has gone to the sand, where he was brought up. No! We are all brought up on the sand. ...'

This incomprehensible monologue completely mystified the crowd. All the eyes, enlarged and inquisitive, were fastened on the two brothers. A brooding silence prevailed.

'Can't I keep that piece of paper as a souvenir?' the younger brother, waking up at last from his delirium, asked the coroner.

'Souvenir? Why?' the coroner asked back.

'Oh, never mind!' interrupted the elder brother. 'But do let us bury the dead young man with a proper funeral. He hasn't got a family. We shall feel better to see him rest in peace.'

It was a philanthropic gesture, so it was commended by the public. But, to the great amazement of all, the funeral appeared as stately as that of a rich landlord. Many people, including those vagabond actors on the wide river, were invited to the ceremony and given a huge meal. The procession stretched out nearly a mile long. The young robber

was buried in a leeward place on a hill situated above the sandy beach and overlooking the ever-flowing river, on which hundreds of stooping trackers with wind-cracked faces brought their heavily loaded bamboo flotillas up and down the current, day and night, in order to scrape together enough money to carry on their joyless existence. A piece of rectangular stone was set up before the grave, with the inscription: 'Here Lies an Unknown Great Artist, Who Devoted His Life to the Entertainment of the Lonely Trackers.' The whole outlay was so luxurious and expensive that the two brothers must have squandered all their fortune on it.

'I think they are mad,' the town crier commented after the affair. 'I bet they will have to shut up their shop.'

He was right. The day after the funeral the shop was closed. It was never opened again. All that its former customers could find was a placard hanging by a string on the door with the words: 'In mourning for a close relative.' It sometimes danced all by itself in the wind. No one knew where the two brothers had gone. Only once an old market gardener said that on his way to the town one morning he had seen them in the attire of strolling players. They were hurrying to some leeward sandy beach, where a group of trackers were waiting for a joke or two in order to get into a cheerful mood to begin the day's work. But the old gardener insisted that he could not be definitely sure whether they really were the two ex-shopkeepers, as 'first my old eyes are, as a rule, a bit hazy in the morning, and secondly the morning fog was, as an exception, terribly thick.'

THE CRITICAL VIEW

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T. C. Worsley

THE STRATFORD FESTIVAL, 1949

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The appointment of Mr Anthony Quayle as the Director of the Stratford Memorial Theatre ensured that the highly successful policy of last season would be continued this. That policy had made the Stratford season, I think I am right in saying, a financial success for the first time for many years; but it also made it a striking artistic success. Ever since the end of the war its reputation had been steadily mounting: last season it reached the position which it should always have held, that of producing Shakespeare's plays as well as, if not better than, anywhere else in the country. The difficulty in the way of achieving this before has been one that is inherent in the way our theatre is organized at present. London has been the only place in which an actor can get that recognition which will give him the chance to make headway in his profession. How to lure good actors from London for nine crucial months – that has been the problem for all those who were anxious to spread theatre right over provincial England. There was only one way – to raise the prestige of other centres so high that leaving London for *them* would be a step up in an actor's career, not a step down. The great success of the post-war Old Vic enabled Bristol to make a modest start; and the enterprise of Messrs Quayle, Helpmann, Tearle, Benthall and Miss Diana Wynyard put Stratford on the way to achieving such a prestige in 1948.

The problem this year is to repeat the success – and that is always a problem. Mr Tearle and Miss Wynyard have been persuaded to stay on: but there is no equivalent this year of Mr Helpmann, alas. His King John last year and his Shylock were both performances incomparable in their kind and his Hamlet, if not so complete a success, was at least extremely interesting. However, with Mr Tearle available this season *Macbeth* was an obvious choice. It was a rôle he had not played before. But his Othello last year and his Antony after the war suggested that he would be a magnificent Macbeth. Miss Wynyard was a less obvious choice for Lady Macbeth (but one fully justified in the event): we may suppose *Much Ado About Nothing* was chosen as the second play to give her the chance to play Beatrice. The third play is *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which gives a chance to another of the season's stars, this time the producer, Mr Michael Benthall. Fourthly there is *Cymbeline* in which one of the young newcomers, Miss Kathleen Michael, was to have her chance as Imogen. Finally after last season's *Othello* has been re-absorbed there is to be Mr Tyrone Guthrie's production of *Henry VIII*.

The first four of these plays have now opened and we have the chance of estimating how this season is going. The first thing we notice is that in scale and style it does not fall below last. All these are big productions mounted by leading designers and with the producer's individual touch very clearly marked on them. Three of them (Mr Gielgud's production of *Much Ado* is the exception, I think) have been criticized more or less severely on this account. 'Too much production!' is the complaint, though the underlying reason for the complaint in the opening weeks was the poor standard of the verse-speaking. 'If only there were less "production", less time spent on grouping and lighting and scenery and music and more on teaching the actors to speak – or letting them just get their words out, there would have been much better productions altogether.' It is an objection which

I personally do not admit, for, though I agree on the fact of the bad standard of speaking, I think the cause of it lies elsewhere than in 'too much production'.

Thus the fact that the *Macbeth* was only a limited success must be attributed largely to a lack of weight from Mr Tearle. His performance has no doubt strengthened and deepened by now. But at the opening it was distinctly weak in attack, weight and volume. Yet surely the producer (the Director himself, Mr Anthony Quayle) was justified in supposing, on the basis of past performances, that he could afford, with so fine an actor in the main rôle, to build up to almost any extent that violent barbarism in the detail, in the crowds and subsidiary characters which was at the root of his reading of the play. If the result looked over-produced it was not the fault of the producer; and where might we have been without this 'production'? As it was this was in many respects a most exciting version of the play. Miss Wynyard had not last season (her first in Shakespeare, I believe) done much more than play her parts gracefully and with the experienced finish of the polished actress. Certainly she had not given any hint that she was going to be able to produce the hard, strong, steely quality that she turned up with in this *Macbeth*. This was a splendid surprise for us. There were other felicities, too, in the casting (which the rest of the plays were not always lucky enough to find). Mr Harry Andrews comes with experience of Shakespearian acting from the Old Vic. There I had often thought his reading of parts to be sketched in too large outlines round them, leaving the detail within too unfinished. But his Macduff suffered from no such deficiencies. It was all filled in from the inside: the edges precise and formed; his voice splendid, and the whole conception excellently tuned to the producer's prevailing mood. His reception of the news of the murder of his wife and children was a little gem of pathetic acting. Another newcomer who left a considerable impression on us by the end of four plays was Mr Clement McCallin. He gave us a Malcolm vigorous, active

and virile (it is a part that can easily be namby-pambied), though it is not the best of his rôles. A good romantic actor with an impressive virile presence, he has one great disadvantage against which he has to fight. His voice, though resonant and true, has a distinctly unpleasing timbre which it is difficult at first to get used to and accept.

After this wild Doric, outlandish *Macbeth*, on which the producer stamped a characteristic vigour and violence, Mr Gielgud's production of *Much Ado* slipped down as easily as an oyster. All light and grace, all style and polish. An easy formality was the note. M. Andreu's decor was extremely pretty, the dresses being more successful than the sets, though the second of these was both decorative and ingenious. Mr Gielgud doesn't aim at the pace that seems to delight both Mr Quayle and Mr Benthall in different ways. The comedy moves through its convolutions with the elegance of a set-dance pausing at frequent intervals in the most exciting of 'stills'.

In the end perhaps it was all a little too smooth for perfection; or perhaps the Beatrice and Benedick of Miss Wynyard and Mr Quayle were not sufficiently in contrast with the rest. The texture of their gritty prose should stand out not harshly but decidedly in contrast to the sliding verse of Claudio, Hero, and the rest of the Court. Back in comedy Miss Wynyard slipped a little too far into her old smooth manner; while Mr Quayle, who excels at the blunt down-to-earth parts – Enobarbus, Kent – here seemed to be seduced away from the appropriate roughness by the Italianate smoothness all round him. Even so, the accurate and finished timing of this pair gives the production a fine solid centre. Among the newcomers one noticed in this play Mr George Rose, with a solidly based Dogberry. His excellent character acting and fine resonant voice, intelligently used, are a great asset; and Mr Philip Guard, a very personable Claudio with a light, somewhat breathless but individual touch.

If this *Much Ado* was a continual pleasure to the eye, A

Midsummer Night's Dream which followed it was even more captivating. I have seen Mr James Bailey's highly imaginative and evocative sets described as 'Victorian'. Perhaps this was a false association from the fact that Mendelssohn's music was used, combined with the fact that Mr Bailey did the 1840 décor for Mr Benthall's *Hamlet* last year. I have also seen them described as 'Chantry Bequest'. If only that fund *had* been used to purchase some of the Veroneses on which Mr Bailey's designs are based! Beautifully lighted and managed throughout, this was visually as enchanting a *Dream* as we can reasonably hope to see once in a lifetime. What a pity it was spoiled as a whole by certain very marked failures in the verse-speaking. It was the Oberon and the Titania and the Puck who were the offenders; and it is just in those parts that failure in verse-speaking shows up so badly. If the first two had been differently cast, the verdict on this ravishing production might have been very different. It was not – at least from where I was sitting – a question of audibility, but of giving value to the poetry. Monotony; no shades or gradations; no pleasure in the mere sound communicated to us; and, in the case of Mr Philip Guard's Puck, gabbling and breathlessness. This was a particular pity, for his Puck, a wild adolescent Pan, was always a pleasure to watch. Miss Kathleen Michael, the Titania, is a young actress who made a hit in London in Frank Vosper's *People Like Us*, in which she played the neurotic murderess. It is easy to see how it might have been thought that she would take her chances at Stratford. But so far she has not quite hit it. Her range is still much too small, her voice lugubrious and her whole personality keyed somehow to a gloomy view of life. This will not do for Titania, and for Imogen she has not a developed enough command to carry the rôle.

Cymbeline indeed was the least successful of the productions; and it is a clear demonstration of how much a company like this depends upon the more experienced and star performers. After seeing *Macbeth* and the *Much Ado I*

wrote that there seemed to be 'a particularly strong supporting cast'. After seeing the *Cymbeline* the accent would have been all on the word 'supporting'. For they were left here to prop up themselves (with only Mr Leon Quartermaine's *Cymbeline* quite sure of itself). Mr John Slater as Iachimo, Miss Michael as Imogen, Mr McCallin as Postumus and Mr William Squire as Cloten – the centre of the play depended on them, and they were frankly not quite up to it.

Nor did I very much care for the details of the production. *Cymbeline* is one of the least coherent of the plays and I doubt whether it is susceptible to the Benthall treatment, which consists essentially in tracing out the rhythm and playing it hard so that at the end of one of his productions we have a stronger sense than is commonly the case of the play as a unit. Mr Benthall attempts this here and with the help of Mr Leslie Hurry's wild, romantic sets, gets somewhere towards it. What suffers is the detail, and that shows up badly. Mr Squire's Cloten is an example. The actor 'gave a good performance', as they say, but his neurotic, twisted slobberer is surely a false conception; and, again, Mr Harry Andrews as Pisanio gave a wonderful impersonation of Firs in *The Cherry Orchard*, a wasteful way of playing the part. Wasteful of the talent and the strength that he could have brought to the production and which it badly needed.

Cymbeline, then, was the only one of the four productions so far seen to which I might admit the objection that it was over-produced. Whether Mr Benthall's reading of many of the details convinces or not, the cast was too lightweight to stand up to the broad sweeps of the treatment. But whether they would have done better in some much simpler version must remain an open question. And then, there is the further question whether the wide stage at Stratford, set as far back as it is, can take simplicity effectively. (Among the director's plans for the future is one to make structural alterations which will bring the stage forward.) The special triumphs of the new régime at Stratford all derive from

accepting the limitations of the stage as it is and trying to make the fullest possible use of its shape and size. This has meant abandoning a cherished prejudice of the inter-war years, namely that Taste demands bareness and austerity in production and design. That Taste is not so limited as that the present designers and producers have now quite convinced us, and what one carries away from all of these productions, *Cymbeline* not least, is a large variety of rich poetic, visual memories.

C. V. Wedgwood

JOHN FORD



John Ford was the last great dramatist of the Jacobean age. With the possible exception of Thomas Otway he was the last English playwright who could compass tragedy. His finest plays, written in the sixteen-thirties, tower like galleons among the trim small craft maimed by Shirley and Brome, Cartwright and Carlell on the fast-ebbing tide of English dramatic genius. King Charles I was on the throne, Parliament was temporarily in abeyance, Fletcher and Middleton were dead, Ben Jonson had long abandoned the theatre and the ageing Massinger disputed the domination of the stage with 'Shirley, the morning child, the Muses bred'. The fashion was all for topical comedy and pretty pastoral.

In this company John Ford came out with his troubled and tragic themes. Little is known of his life, scarcely more than the dates of the publication of his poems and plays strung between one certain and one uncertain time-limit: 'John Ford, *b.* 1586, *d.* after 1639'. He was the younger son of a Devonshire gentleman and a great nephew of Lord Chief Justice Popham. He was admitted to the Middle Temple in 1602 but does not appear to have been called to the bar although he is believed to have made a living in some capacity by the law. The ascertainable facts are un-revealing. Failing better evidence his admirers have done their best with that sudden glimpse of him afforded by a couplet of William Heming's:

Deep in a dump John Ford was alone got
With folded arms and melancholy hat.

If the description came from the chatterbox Aubrey and

in prose it would carry more conviction. There, one could feel, was the authentic John Ford; a gloomy figure stalking alone, with his hat pulled well down over his eyes. In the context in which it occurs, however, it may just as well be an oblique reference to his latest play *The Lover's Melancholy*. It is still, strictly speaking, conceivable, though perhaps improbable, that Ford was a loud jolly man with his hat well on the back of his head.

The speculation is of no great consequence since the play, or plays, are the thing. They are, without exception, studies of abnormal psychology or abnormal situations. *The Lover's Melancholy* is a careful dramatic illustration of Burton's *Anatomy*. *The Broken Heart*, *Love's Sacrifice*, *The Lady's Trial*, *The Queen*, and *The Fancies Chaste and Noble* are studies of jealousy, impotence, abstinence and Platonic love. The hero of *Perkin Warbeck* is the victim of delusion, and the protagonists of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* are incestuous lovers.

It is not perhaps surprising that our disordered century has found much to study in Ford's gallery of torment. In the last generation he has been compared to Hardy, Ibsen and Eugene O'Neill among others. But comparisons across the centuries can be misleading. In spite of the careless and persistent use in criticism of such a phrase as 'ahead of his times', the writer, like any other human being, is usually best understood in relation to the epoch in which he was born and lived. Ford combined with the occasional intense and original perception of genius an outlook that was very much of his time.

He had one great disability as a dramatic writer. He was too conscientious and too impressionable a reader. His use of Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* is sometimes almost slavish and his *Perkin Warbeck* only just escapes – though it does escape – from being too literal a dramatization of Bacon's *Life of Henry VII*. He evidently found it difficult to disengage his individual manner of expression from the literary influences which enmeshed him. There are whole scenes in which he merely echoes Shakespeare. It is not

so much the plagiarism of a line or a phrase but a whole manner of treatment. Eroclea, the heroine of *The Lover's Melancholy*, would never have existed but for Viola and Perdita; Palador in the same play closely follows Orsino. The murder of Annabella by Giovanni in *'Tis Pity* is unimaginable without those persistent vibrations which are communicated to it from the murder of Desdemona. The strayed fragments from *Othello* in *Love's Sacrifice* are even more disturbing. The Duke's jealousy is worked up by d'Avalos in the same way and sometimes almost in the same words as the jealousy of Othello is aroused by Iago. When he turns on his wife Bianca and her lover, the Duke outbellows the Moor with his threat:

'To hew your lust-engender'd flesh to shreds,
Pound you to mortar, cut your throats, and mince
Your flesh to mites.'

In *'Tis Pity* these echoes on the whole enrich the play, but they are disturbing in *Love's Sacrifice* where the issue between jealous husband and innocent wife is not so sharp as in *Othello*. Bianca's dubious conduct (she had allowed her lover all that the platonic code allowed, which was a good deal) seems more murky to the modern reader because a comparison with Desdemona is continually forced on him by the sound of the language.

Ford's poetry is not strong in imagery and his consciously enriched lines are often weak and derivative. But he had an original and distinctive use of slow, sweet, monosyllabic cadences and his highest effects are achieved with an exquisite economy.

The recognition scene between the lovers, Palador and the long lost Eroclea, in *The Lover's Melancholy* is one of the most beautiful in all Jacobean drama. Its mood of contemplative lyricism is established in Eroclea's opening speech as she intrudes, like a soft echo, on her lover's soliloquy.

Minutes are numbered by the fall of sands,
 As by an hourglass; the span of time
 Doth waste us to our graves, and we look on it:
 An age of pleasures, revell'd out, comes home
 At last, and ends in sorrow; but the life,
 Weary of riot, numbers every sand,
 Wailing in sighs, until the last drop down;
 So to conclude calamity in rest.

This use of long, and sometimes dragging, vowels to suggest the weariness of man's life is typical of Ford. Typical, too, is the climax of Palador's recognition, expressed in a line of very simple words, charged with a complex of meanings:

Come home, home to my heart, thou banish'd peace,
 Eroclea's return will cure him of his melancholy; his banished peace of mind will be restored. But she *is* herself his peace, and his 'banished peace' in the most literal sense, since she had been exiled.

Dramatically Ford is a poet of understatement, who can heighten the drama by imposing a moment of silence in the midst of storm. In that he is the antithesis of Webster whose music, like Dryden's last trump, untunes the sky. Ford knows the rare value of the hiatus, the sudden slackening of tension, the lull in the wind. So in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, after the agitated and breathless passion of their mutual incestuous avowal, Giovanni and Annabella drop their voices in a moment to a dreamy quiescence.

GIOVANNI: What must we now do?

ANNABELLA: What you will.

GIOVANNI: Come, then;

After so many tears as we have wept,

Let's learn to court in smiles, to kiss, and sleep.

The extravagant character of the sin in this, his most famous play, has partly concealed the orderly framework which sustains Ford's vision of the world. The virtues which he admires are the Stoic virtues, almost the Puritan virtues:

constancy, duty, self-restraint. But these virtues are their own reward. If the weak suffer there is no guarantee that the strong will be spared. The jealous man (the Duke in *Love's Sacrifice*), the passionate man (Giovanni in *'Tis Pity*), and the ambitious man (Ithocles in *The Broken Heart*) fall victims to their errors. But the virtuous Penthea runs mad and the self-disciplined Calantha who continues to dance when the news of her father's and her lover's death is brought to her, dies of a broken heart.

'They are the silent griefs which cut the heart strings;
Let me die smiling.'

Whether he regards his characters with admiration, as he does Calantha, or with pity as he does Annabella and Penthea, Ford submits them with equal relentlessness to the harshness of fate. It is, however, a mistake to see in Ford a man who, either for himself or for his creatures, rebelled against the decrees of Heaven. The apparent injustice of fate moves his heart but does not enrage his intellect. His compassion for men has no reverse side of bitterness against God. The sentimental defiance of Heaven that became popular in the nineteenth century was foreign to the profoundly religious seventeenth century.

When religious belief is still universal there is no need for a writer to emphasize his acceptance of it. It is only to-day when believers are in a minority that the religious writer is compelled to draw special attention to his beliefs. Ford's view of the universe was fatalistic; it was not secular. Many passages in his plays suggest that he subscribed to the widely-held contemporary belief in predestination. The moral attitude, or lack of moral attitude, in his plays fits in with this belief.

It is true that the instrumental villains, d'Avalos in *Love's Sacrifice* and Putana in *'Tis Pity* are sentenced to death to satisfy worldly justice. But on the guilt of the principles Ford made no final comment. The belief in predestination is after all merely one expression of the idea that judgement

rests with God; the final evidence is, and has always been, comprehensible to him alone. Ford, in refusing to make any other comment than 'tis pity' stands aside from judgement; he may even go so far as to imply, very slightly, that Heaven's judgement may be other than any that the world, with its commonplace views of right and wrong, can possibly arrive at. Giovanni's last words are suggestive:

Where'er I go let me enjoy this grace
Freely to view my Annabella's face.

The image most present to Ford's mind was doubtless that of the lovers in Dante's *Inferno*. But the use of the word 'grace' can hardly be accidental, and the ideas that it called up to the seventeenth century mind were very definite. It may be, after all, that God's judgement rests on premises other than those of the world.

There is little in Ford's writing to suggest defiance or resentment of the authority which rules the world, still less disbelief in it. The point is important if we are to understand the consistency of his outlook. Deeply as he pitied the predicament of the individual he was far removed from modern individualism; he was far removed even from the fractious independence which was stirring in his own time. His absorption in the writing of *Burton* is not insignificant in this respect, for *The Anatomy of Melancholy* is not conceived in terms of the new scientific thought of the age, but is based on the old doctrine of the humours. *Burton* believed in harmony, balance and a guiding pattern in the world. So did Ford. So do most of his characters. Giovanni indeed, in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, goes to the extreme of arguing that his love for Annabella is essentially in accordance with natural and divine laws.

Are we not therefore each to other bound
So much the more by nature? by the links
Of blood, of reason? nay, if you will have't,
Even of religion, to be ever one,
One soul, one flesh, one love, one heart, one all?

In a more commonplace manner the melancholy prince, Palador, muses on the rules which govern created things:

As there is by nature
In everything created contrariety,
So likewise is there unity and league
Between them in their kind: but man, the abstract
Of all perfection, which the workmanship
Of heaven hath modell'd, in himself contains
Passions of several qualities. The music
Of man's fair composition best accords
When 'tis in consort, not in single strains:
My heart has been untuned these many months,
Wanting her presence, in whose equal love
True harmony consisted.

There is pattern and harmony of a kind even in the untidy and unsatisfactory sexual relations which are the subject of *Love's Sacrifice* – where the heroine Bianca in spite of the outrageous encouragement she gives to her lover remains technically faithful to her husband – or *The Fancies Chaste and Noble* in which the 'fancies', too aptly named, are the demi-virginal members of a harem. The conduct of these people is, however, governed by the laws of Platonic love as Ford understood it. Tragedy is brought about by deviation from the pattern. In *Love's Sacrifice* the Duke's jealousy shatters the Platonic dream; in *The Broken Heart* Ithocles has set tragedy in motion before the play begins by forcing his sister Penthea to an inharmonious marriage, an act unworthy of his own better nature. In *'Tis Pity* the love of Giovanni and Annabella is an offence against the accepted rules of love and the normal harmony as established within the family. Giovanni is represented as being a religious melancholic, and therefore a man in whom balance and harmony are already tangled and out of gear.

Stepping for once from the world of passions to that of politics, Ford, in 1634, about a year after the publication of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, completed the tragedy of *Perkin*

Warbeck. If this play lacks alike the lyricism of *The Broken Heart* and the dramatic intensity of *'Tis Pity*, it is the best constructed and the most ably sustained play that he ever wrote. It is based on Bacon's *Life of Henry VII*, that admirable narrative exposition of the art of kingship. But while Ford the scholar sticks very close to his authorities, Ford the dramatist perceives and illumines the heroic paradox of Perkin Warbeck's character. Henry VII is the able, careful King who, like an intelligent huntsman, draws the net dispassionately round his quarry. Our sympathies are with the hunted. Perkin Warbeck is not merely a scheming pretender; he is a man sincerely convinced that he is the long-lost son of Edward IV, a man whose conviction of greatness gradually endows him with real greatness. The more trivial of the bystanders dismiss him finally as a madman. Henry VII, the embodiment of worldly sanity and justice, sends him to the scaffold.

Warbeck himself remains constant in his delusion to the end and Ford, as usual, withholds his own opinion. But he has introduced in Katharine Gordon, the pretender's wife, a character who probably speaks more explicitly than any other his opinion not only of Warbeck but of man's predicament. Katharine, from the moment of her marriage at the height of Warbeck's good fortune to her final parting from him in the pillory, never falters in the steadiness of her attitude towards him. She makes it clear on their wedding day that his claim to be a King and even his actual identity are not the aspects of him that matter to her. She answers his gay offer to crown her empress of the west with:

You have a noble language, sir; your right
In me is without question, and however
Events of time may shorten my deserts
In others' pity, yet it shall not stagger
Or constancy or duty in a wife.
You must be king of me; and my poor heart
Is all I can call mine.

So, when urged by her friends to cast off the impudent impostor on his way to death, she rejects the suggestion:

You abuse us;
For when the holy churchman joined our hands
Our vows were real then; the ceremony
Was not in apparition but in act ...

And, turning to Warbeck himself ends with:

Be what these people term thee, I am certain
Thou art my husband; no divorce in heaven
Has been sued out between us.

There is a foreshadowing of Katharine Gordon in the part of Winifred in *The Witch of Edmonton*. In this collaborative work of Ford, Dekker and Rowley, the character of the murderer's distracted wife is thought to be the work of Ford. Winifred is a low-life sketch for the nobler character of Katharine Gordon, and the husband to whose dreadful fortunes she has bound herself has none of Warbeck's redeeming features, but she, like Katharine, sees beyond his acts and fortunes to the essence of his being and still sets her love on that.

In the relations of Winifred and Frank, Ford is doing no more than delineating the effect of love between a woman and a man. It seems possible that in the more nobly and more carefully drawn character of Katherine Gordon he is hinting at something beyond human love, allowing us to see for a moment his conception of the love of God. Man is not condemned or pardoned, lost or saved through a reasoned assessment of his acts, but by something which, like love, is outside and beyond reason.

J. C. Hall

EDWIN MUIR: AN INTRODUCTION

I

Edwin Muir is a serious writer whose achievement is broadly acknowledged but whose actual work has been strangely neglected. His poems, for instance, appear in few anthologies, and I know of no adequate interpretation of his work. This is all the more surprising when we consider how much attention has been paid to many of his contemporaries; and how, on the face of it, his work would appear to reflect certain recent literary trends. I say 'reflect' deliberately, for Muir cannot be said to represent any modern school or clique. He is an essentially individual writer, whose innate distrust of 'personalities' partly explains, perhaps, why after thirty years we still have to discover his work for ourselves. He has published some dozen volumes of poetry and criticism (including a most illuminating study of the novel), three novels, an autobiography, a biography of John Knox, and various books on Scotland. He is also, with his wife, a gifted translator, whose translations of Kafka in particular have been largely responsible for introducing that extraordinary genius to English readers. It is as a poet, I think, that Muir has done his most characteristic work, and this essay is therefore mainly an introduction to his poetry. But first I would like to say something about Muir himself, for a writer's background often helps us to understand certain aspects of his work. This is certainly so in Muir's case, and we are fortunate in having his own account of the first thirty-five years of his life in *The Story and the Fable*,* a book of great beauty and honesty of feeling.

* *The Story and the Fable* (Harrap, 1940).

Muir was born in 1887 in Orkney. His father came of farming stock, and he grew up in the raw, vivid atmosphere of the farmyard – ‘a carnival of birth and death’, as he calls it. For company Muir had three brothers, two sisters, and a much older cousin, Sutherland, a remarkable character whose habits were ‘a great danger to the young women of Wyre, Rousay and Egilsay’. Sutherland appears in Muir’s novel of the Scottish Reformation, *The Three Brothers*,* and it was perhaps in tribute to his originality that Muir gave the fictitious character not only very much the same rôle, but also the same name, as that of his childhood companion.

Muir’s description of his childhood among the islands is a brilliant piece of writing both for the picture it gives us of Orkney at that time and for its deeply sympathetic study of a child’s mind. He was a sensitive boy and these early years, happy though they often were, were also full of doubt and strain for him. No doubt this was partly due to the fact that his father was constantly having to move from farm to farm owing to the exactions of the landlord (the ‘Little General’ of one of his poems). Gradually a sense of discouragement settled on the family; one by one the brothers and sisters broke away to try their fortunes elsewhere, until finally only Edwin and his sister Clara remained to help their parents. Eventually the father, worn out by the desperate struggle, packed up the family belongings and moved to Glasgow. Muir was fourteen at the time.

This move to Glasgow called for a power of adaptation which was beyond many of the members of this simply-bred family. ‘The first few years after we came to Glasgow,’ writes Muir, ‘were so stupidly wretched, such a meaningless waste of inherited virtue, that I cannot write of them even now without confused grief and anger.’ One by one the members of the family were carried off by death: first the father from sheer exhaustion, then Willie by consumption,

* *The Three Brothers* (Heinemann, 1931).

Johnnie by a tumour on the brain, and finally his mother by some obscure disease. The futility, the bitter sense of loss, of these years lies heavily upon this part of his autobiography and is reflected, too, in his novels. In *The Three Brothers*, for instance, Sandy's death from consumption clearly echoes Willie's fate; while in *Poor Tom** Muir gives us an almost undisguised account of the appalling disease which had reduced Johnnie to a helpless cripple. These two novels are not, I think, altogether satisfactory in themselves, but the note of personal tragedy underlying them gives them a certain undeniable power.

Muir stayed in Glasgow for eighteen years and during this time worked at a remarkable variety of jobs: as office clerk, chauffeur's assistant, and, for two fantastic years, as a clerk in a bone-factory. His descriptions of these jobs and of the 'people he met' give us a fascinating picture of the life of a big city and particularly of Muir's intellectual interests at this time – his conversion to Socialism, his discovery of the *New Era*, and his passionate absorption in the work of Heine and Nietzsche, who seemed to offer him some sort of compensation for the squalid life he was leading.

When the war came Muir, whose health had suffered under the stress of experience, was passed unfit for active service and took a job in a ship-building office, devoting much of his spare time to the National Guilds movement. About this time, too, he began to write, and, although the aphorisms he published in the *New Age* appeared to him later merely as a reflection of his mental confusion, they did at least bring him into contact with other writers. These were his happiest years in Glasgow, but a new phase in his life was soon to begin. In 1919 he married Willa Anderson and moved to London.

Muir has called his marriage (to which he has paid touching tribute in some recent poems) the most fortunate

* *Poor Tom* (Dent, 1932).

event of his life. It helped him to face up at last to the vague fears that had weighed him down more and more during his life in Glasgow. Shortly after his arrival in London he began treatment with a psycho-analyst, and his account of the analysis is one of the most interesting chapters in his book. I will not attempt to describe it here, but read within its context it clearly reveals how deeply this painful experience altered the course of his life, enabling him to climb out of the dark despairs and frustrations of his early years. And – what is important for us – it released those creative forces without which he could never have developed as a writer.

II

The Story and the Fable was published in 1940, but (with the exception of a few extracts from a later diary) it does not carry us beyond 1922. Muir felt he could not write with sufficient clarity of later occurrences – a decision we may regret, for it leaves us with no record of his career as a writer. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to see why Muir chose to break off at this point; it was a natural turning-point in his life. ‘I was thirty-five then,’ he writes, ‘and passing through a stage which, if things had been different, I should have reached ten years earlier. I have felt that handicap ever since. I began to write poetry at thirty-five instead of twenty-five or twenty.’ Does this mean that an artist necessarily loses by developing late? In Muir’s early work there are many of the faults of diction which we associate with a younger poet, but there is also a considerable gain in psychological perception. Indeed it reveals very clearly the imaginative depths opened up by his analysis. His strange symbolical novel *The Marionette*,* in which the father tries to rehabilitate his feeble-witted son by encouraging him to work out his conflicts in games with dolls and marionettes, could have been written, one feels, only by someone for

* *The Marionette* (Hogarth Press, 1927).

whom this drama had more than a merely intellectual significance. And perhaps it is worth noting here that Muir's analysis, though beneficial, was not complete; he broke it off after nine months to go abroad. Whether or not we regard this as adding to the significance of his work, Muir has certainly acknowledged the therapeutic value of art and shown how in one poem ('Ballad of Hector in Hades') he worked out, quite spontaneously, a childhood terror.*

The Story and the Fable is a title that leads us immediately to the heart of Muir's thought. 'In themselves,' he writes, 'our conscious lives may not be particularly interesting. But what we are not and can never be, our fable, seems to me inconceivably interesting. I should like to write that fable, but I cannot even live it; and all I could do if I related the outward course of my life would be to show how I have deviated from it.' This double vision of life haunts Muir, and his work is an attempt to understand it by means of dreams and other subconscious activities. Muir describes a great many dreams in his autobiography, and this is certainly one reason why we should read it before approaching his poetry. In this respect Muir can be said to reflect a tendency in modern literature – the attempt to find poetical form for psychological concepts. Faced with this task the modern poet has explored the world of myth, but how tedious, how drily intellectual, many of these explorations are! Muir succeeds where others fail because this approach is integral to his vision of the world and goes back deep into his childhood, to the Orkney 'where there was no great distinction between the ordinary and the fabulous; the lives of living men turned into legend'. At that time the fable was real to him; but later the distinction grew greater and to bridge that gulf his mind turned to metaphysics.

This, then, the destiny of the human soul, is at the centre

* Rilke, when faced with the possibility of psycho-analysis, refused 'this operation, this great clearing-up which is not done by life'. He sought a solution in his art, and the *Elegies* and *Sonnets* are, surely, his justification.

of Muir's work. 'Our minds are possessed by three mysteries: where we come from, where we are going, and, since we are not alone, but members of a countless family, how we should live with one another.' Muir has called one of his volumes of poems *Journeys and Places*,* and this aptly describes his preoccupation. For the history and evolution of mankind is most easily conceived of as an endless journey through Time, which we can begin to understand only in certain recognizable stages or 'places'. 'One or two stages in it I can recognize; the age of innocence and the Fall, and all the dramatic consequences which arise from the Fall. But these lie behind experience, not on the surface; they are not historical events; they are stages in the fable.' We are helped to understanding through our own experience, for each man does in a sense re-enact the fable in his life. First, there is the coming to birth, described most beautifully in 'The Voyage':

That sea was greater than we knew.

Week after week the empty round
Went with us; the Unchanging grew,
And we were headed for that bound ...

Our days were then - I cannot tell
How we were then fulfilled and crowned
With life as in a parable,
And sweetly as gods together bound.

Delusion and dream! Our captain knew
Compass and clock had never yet
Failed him; the sun and stars were true.
The mark was there that we should hit.

And it rose up, a sullen stain
Flawing the crystal firmament.
A wound! We felt the familiar pain
And knew the place to which we were sent.

* A full bibliography of Muir's poetry will be found at the end of this essay.

The crowds drew near, the toppling towers;
In hope and fear we drove to birth;
The dream and a truth we clutched as ours,
And gladly, blindly stepped on earth.

Then comes the timeless age of childhood when 'the earth, the houses on the earth, and the life of every human being are related to the sky over-arching them; as if the sky fitted the earth.'

My childhood all a myth
Enacted in a distant isle;
Time with his hour glass and his scythe
Stood dreaming on the dial,
And did not move the whole day long
That immobility might save
Continually the dying song,
The flower, the falling wave.

(*'The Myth'.*)

Muir perfectly understands this stage, which yet must be broken as contradiction enters life and earth and sky are dislocated 'as if the frame of things were ruptured'. Then 'archaic fevers' begin to shake the blood and some ancient burden falls upon the soul.

The fathers' anger and ache
Will not, will not away
And leave the living alone,
But on our careless brows
Faintly their furrows engrave
Like veinings in a stone ...

The angers will not away.
We hold our fathers' trust,
Wrong, riches, sorrow and all
Until they topple and fall,
And fallen let in the day.

(*'The Fathers'.*)

This need to 'let in the day', to understand oneself and through oneself the life of mankind, is the eternal quest of the soul.

In our search for understanding we are constantly thwarted by Time. Time is the great protagonist in Muir's spiritual drama, the enemy before whose advance all vision disintegrates, all action is transformed. Muir's poems are indeed what one of his titles suggests, 'Variations on a Time Theme', for it is Time's despotic presence that haunts his pages.

Here at my earthly station set,
The revolutions of the year
Bear me bound and only let
This astronomic world appear.

Yet if I could reverse my course
Through ever-deepening yesterday,
Retrace the path that led me here,
Could I find a different way?
(*'The Stationary Journey'*.)

This is an ultimate question, to which the poet returns again and again. The idea of predestination has always fascinated Muir (witness his interest in Calvinism and his early devotion to Nietzsche), but it has become increasingly clear that the negation of human will is no part of his philosophy. If he has shown us, more starkly than any other writer, mankind closed in the grip of Time and Change, it is surely to underline the immensity of the struggle for liberation which is behind all spiritual endeavour.

Forward our towering shadows fall
Upon the naked nicheless wall,
And all we see is that shadow-dance.
Yet looking at each countenance
I read this burden in them all:

'I lean my cheek from Eternity
For Time to slap, for Time to slap.
I gather my bones from the bottomless clay
To lay my head in the light's lap'.
(*'The Human Fold'*.)

This image of the aspiring spirit runs through even the most forbidding of Muir's poems. If the struggle is bitter, it is because Time has robbed us of the ability to recognize the truth for which we seek.

We hurried here for some such thing and now
Wander the countless roads to seek our prize,
That far within the maze serenely lies,
While all around each trivial shape exclaims:
'Here is your jewel; this is your longed-for day',
And we forget, lost in the countless names.
(*'The Prize'*.)

The soul is lost and yet it knows there must be a way. It is not surprising, then, that Muir should have been drawn to Kafka, of whom he writes:* 'The image of a road comes into our minds when we think of his stories; for in spite of all the confusions and contradictions in which he was involved he held that life was a way, not a chaos, that the right way exists and can be found by a supreme and exhausting effort, and that every human being in fact follows some way, right or wrong.'

III

Edwin Muir is a metaphysical writer whose work calls, therefore, for a rather special perception of its qualities. Outwardly unassertive, it has throughout a subdued passion of its own: intellectual, yet springing, we cannot doubt,

* *Essays on Literature and Society* (Hogarth Press, 1949).

from deep emotional experience. It is true that Muir is a poet of certain limitations; but these very limitations give his work a single-mindedness and formal clarity which are all too rare in poetry to-day. Reading his work over twenty-five years we discern little development in the usual sense of the term; rather an ever deeper exploration of a single theme, a gradual discovery of meaning. In this, perhaps, Muir is closer to European than English ways of thought. We have already seen how he has illuminated his own work in writing of Kafka. Here is a passage from his essay on Hölderlin in the same collection:

'The imagination in Hölderlin's poetry is obviously related to dreams. It is not the kind of imagination which deals with ordinary experience – for instance, the life around it – but has its subject-matter given to it in a quite different way, somewhat as the subject-matter of a dream is given in sleep. It has, therefore, very little specifically to do with the contemporary world, like a good deal of romantic poetry and almost all mystical poetry. Or at most it regards the contemporary world as the Old Testament prophets regarded it; that is, in general terms, as falling short of its vision. This imagination is unlike any other kind; for while it works with greater freedom than ordinary imagination, one can hardly say on what it works: the ancestral racial dream material of which Jung speaks, or the delusive desires of mankind in all ages.'

A brief examination of Muir's imagery will show how relevant this criticism is to his own work.*

Although Muir is not a religious poet in the narrow sense, his poetry is nevertheless informed with deep religious feel-

* Although his poetry has some points in common with Jungian psychology, there is nothing to suggest that Muir is a follower of Jung. True poetry of this type derives from forces within the poet, not from psychological theory – a point worth emphasizing in this age of 'psychological' criticism.

ing. He recognizes the validity of Biblical imagery and has often used it in his work. In *Variations on a Time Theme*, for instance, mankind's eternal quest finds symbolic expression in the Israelites' long wanderings in the wilderness. In 'Moses' he gives us a vivid picture of the great leader surveying the promised land from Mount Pisgah and yet blind to what must come after – the great disasters, exiles, and migrations which laid waste the promised land and gave rise to the ghettos of Europe. But perhaps the most fundamental image of this type in Muir's poetry is that of the Fall. For the Fall is clearly of archetypal importance in the fable, a macrocosm of each individual's fall from childhood grace of which we spoke earlier.

What shape had I before the Fall?
What hills and rivers did I seek?
What were my thoughts then? And of what
Forgotten histories did I speak

To my companions? Did our eyes
From their foredestined watching-place,
See Heaven and Earth one land and range
Therein through all of Time and Space? ...

The ancient pain returns anew.
Where was I ere I came to man?
What shape among the shapes that once
Agelong through endless Eden ran?

(‘The Fall’.)

These lines come from a poem which is in effect a condensed version of a remarkable vision which Muir had at the time of his analysis. It is interesting, therefore, to set it beside that part of the vision which clearly points back to the same stage of evolution.

‘All that I remember next is wandering through a rough woodland country interspersed with little brown rocks, where there were troops of low-browed, golden-haired,

silent creatures somewhat like monkeys, and seeing in the distance a procession of white-robed female figures slowly passing as if to silent music. I wandered there, it seemed to me, for a long time. I remember coming to what I thought was the green, mossy trunk of a fallen tree; as I looked I saw it was a dragon, and that it was slowly weeping its eyes into a little heap before it ...'

Psychologically, this strange passage is most interesting; but here I am concerned only with its bearing on his imagery. Commenting on the passage Muir suggests that the white-robed figures wandering among the animals have a prophetic significance, as if 'long before man appeared on the earth he existed as a dream or prophecy in the animal soul'. This intimate relation between man and the animal world is something we are now only obscurely aware of. 'The age that felt this connection between men and the animals was so much longer than the brief historical period known to us that we can scarcely conceive it. In that age everything was legendary, and the creatures went about like characters in a parable of beasts. ... They were protagonists in the first sylvan war, half human and half pelted and feathered, from which rose the community and the arts. Man felt guilty towards them, for he took their lives day after day, in obedience to a custom so long established that no one could say when it began.' Such ideas of necessity and guilt no longer consciously trouble us; and yet these natural forces are still working in our unconscious minds, held down by the weight of civilization, and if they break through it will be in a modified or distorted form.

Muir has found a brilliant symbol for this concept in heraldry. For the heraldic image seems to bridge the past and the present and express in a vivid way the intellectualization of natural forces which has taken place in modern life.

Who curbed the lion long ago
And penned him in this towering field
And reared him wingless in the sky?

And quenched the dragon's burning eye,
Chaining him here to make a show,
The faithful guardian of the shield?

A fabulous wave far back in Time
Flung these calm trophies to this shore
That looks out on a different sea.
These relics of a buried war,
Empty as shape and cold as rhyme,
Gaze now on fabulous wars to be.

(Variations, X.)

This sort of imagery, with its interplay of static and dynamic ideas, is peculiarly suited to Muir's thought.

The covenant of god and animal,
The frieze of fabulous creatures winged and crowned,
And in the midst the woman and the man –

Lost long ago in fields beyond the Fall –
Keep faith in sleep-walled night and there are found
On our long journey back where we began.

(‘The Covenant’.)

All the creatures in Muir's work are clothed in this heraldic light; they move across his dreams, but it is significant that they are rarely creatures of nightmare. They are natural denizens of the poet's universe, and Muir has woven them into a background of legendary scene and drama which gives his poetry something of the strange, timeless quality of a tapestry.

The Fall, then, is the central point in the fable. Behind him the poet sees the dim, receding vistas of Adam's world; before him 'man's long shadow driving on', in its eternal quest for the lost godhead. If the poet is to transcend his own circumstances he must enter imaginatively into the great legendary and historical situations of the past. We

have already seen how Muir has used Biblical imagery for this purpose; in other poems he goes to different sources. There is, for instance, a group of poems written round the idea of the fallen town or citadel, betrayed and brought to ruin by Time and the human agents of Time. The archetype of this situation is the fall of Troy, which appears again and again in Muir's work. In another brilliantly conceived poem, 'Then', he gives us a picture of the first anonymous upheavals of life:

There were no men and women then at all,
But the flesh lying alone,
And angry shadows fighting on a wall
That now and then sent out a groan
Buried in lime and stone,
And sweated now and then like tortured wood
Big drops that looked yet did not look like blood ...

If there had been women there they might have wept
For the poor blood, unowned, unwanted,
Blank as forgotten script.
The wall was haunted
By mute maternal presences whose sighing
Fluttered the fighting shadows and shook the wall
As if that fury of death itself were dying.

Elsewhere he takes as his theme a personal crisis in the life of some great character; Tristram, for instance, or Oedipus, whose guilt seeks expiation in the innocence from which it came:

I have wrought and thought in darkness,
And stand here now, an innocent mark of shame,
That so men's guilt might be made manifest
In such a walking riddle – their guilt and mine,
For I've but acted out this fable. I have judged
Myself, obedient to the gods' high judgment,

And seen myself with their pure eyes, have learnt
That all must bear a portion of the wrong
That is driven deep into our fathomless hearts
Past sight or thought; that bearing it we may ease
The immortal burden of the gods who keep
Our natural steps and the earth and skies from harm.
(‘Oedipus’.)

In one of his finest poems, ‘Hölderlin’s Journey’, Muir tries to answer imaginatively the question that still baffles literary historians: What happened to drive Hölderlin mad during his mysterious journey across France to Germany in the summer of 1805? While he was making this journey, his beloved Diotima was dying in Frankfurt, and in this poem Muir suggests that Hölderlin had a sudden premonition of her death and that this unhinged his mind.

Perhaps already she I sought,
She, sought and seeker, had gone by,
And each of us in turn was trapped
By simple treachery.

The evening brought a field, a wood.
I left behind the hills of lies,
And watched beside a mouldering gate
A deer with its rock-crystal eyes.

On either pillar of the gate
A deer’s head watched within the stone.
The living deer with quiet look
Seemed to be gazing on

Its pictured death – and suddenly
I knew, Diotima was dead,
As if a single thought had sprung
From the cold and the living head.

In this image, so complex and yet so wonderfully lucid, Muir seems to me to symbolize the theme which runs

through all his work – the ambivalence of human life. Man seeking in man sought, man immortal in man mortal, the story and the fable – out of this duality springs suddenly the ‘single thought’ from which poetry is made.

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David Higham

LIBRETTIST AND COMPOSER

The success of *Peter Grimes*, the first British opera to attain the international repertory, and to a lesser extent of *The Rape of Lucretia* and *Albert Herring*, has set our other composers teaming up with potential librettists for a major assault on the same objective. This, then, is perhaps the moment to consider afresh just what the relationship between composer and librettist implies.

It sounds like simple common sense to suggest that any collaboration should be a partnership on equal terms which can flourish only if each partner is able to contribute equal value. To achieve a result which should be greater than the sum of the parts this seems essential. So also must be a collaborative spirit and a consequent readiness to give and take: this is effective only between equals.

Now the history of opera is remarkable for the very rare occasions on which librettist and composer have been in *value* equal. Because an opera with bad music could not survive anyway, no one knows what operas, if any, were written by bad composers to good libretti. Many operas do survive with poor libretti: though that, perhaps, may happen less often in future. We ought not to be misled by present conditions of opera-presentation into believing that the purely musical qualities of an opera like *Il Trovatore* will always prevail over the absurdities of its story and text: still less must we argue that story and text do not matter. Most lives of operatic composers refer to operas 'unjustly neglected because of the bad libretto'.

Modern opera began with a great collaboration between Mozart and da Ponte – and then there are no pairs of equals (apart from Wagner who was his own librettist and so will

not concern us) until we come to Verdi and Boito and then Strauss and von Hofmannsthal. Practically all the operas in between were written to libretti supplied by hacks or by amateurs. One consequence of this is that it is rarely possible to discover how far either librettist or composer was responsible for the final form: no doubt the composer was all too frequently compelled to do the librettist's part in dramatic presentation, as well as his own proper share of that activity. The result is that such of those operas as survive (and what a small number that is out of any one composer's output, e.g. Rossini, Donizetti, even Verdi) are all more or less 'unsatisfactory'; and I suggest that that unsatisfactoriness is most often due to bad libretti. Look, after all, at what those same composers would do for a good libretto: or even with the parts of a bad one which are not so bad.

Of the three named partnerships, Strauss-von-Hofmannsthal is at the moment at an awkward stage. Both men's work is of that period just so far away from us that we cannot fairly judge it. Musically, in particular, the operas are out of fashion. There are two points to observe – first, that Strauss came to opera after a highly successful career in the world of symphonic tone-poems and that this seems to have much affected the musical structure of his operas and also to account for the longueurs in, say, *Rosenkavalier*, in each Act of which there are passages where the action seems to be drawn out for the sake of the music; second, that these two did produce, in *Rosenkavalier*, one of the very few successful operas based on a librettist's original story. The correspondence between them covering their collaborations was occasionally acrimonious. But it seems to have been fought out on equal terms in spite of von Hofmannsthal's outward deferences; and the collaboration endured.

The case of Verdi and Boito is especially interesting. Boito was an extraordinary mixture of musician and poet: he had both composed operas and written other people's libretti before he came to write libretti for Verdi, who had

been writing opera for fifty years and more and had never had a really good libretto to do it to. What resulted? Two absolute masterpieces, each written to a libretto which, it seems, was accepted by the composer as (after discussion of course) the librettist wrote it. So we praise *Otello* as a dramatic masterpiece presented in worthy and appropriate words (quite few of which derive directly from Shakespeare); and Verdi was so stimulated by it that he produced the most magnificent and effective music of his career. What, one wonders, would Boito have made of *Macbeth*?

And so to Mozart and da Ponte, who opened up a new *kind* of opera, instead of consummating an old kind; and did so in contemporary terms and idioms, verbal as well as musical. (Though the scenes were Spain and Italy, and the period of *Don Giovanni* what you will, all three operas breathe Imperial Vienna of the 1780's.)

Equals these two, surely! The wit and apparent simplicity of da Ponte's words is matched – but not overwhelmed – by the same qualities in Mozart's music. And so in *Così* and *Figaro* they wrote the first of our musical comedies. (*Così*, by the way, was another original story.)

The term 'musical comedy' has come down in the world since those days, and the product too. But dramatically speaking it is still the same in kind and inferior, technicalities apart, only in degree. Many vestiges survive, above all the heroine's sentimental song in the last act, direct descendants of 'Deh Vieni' and Fiordiligi's second aria. If words have any meaning, a good comic opera should be a good musical comedy. There is nothing inferior in the kind.

How then is a comic opera to be defined? It ought to be possible to answer 'A first-rate opera which is comic instead of serious'; but we shall have to fall back on 'An opera where the music is first-rate but which is, etc,' simply because so many operas which are serious are called first-rate almost solely on account of their musical quality and in the face of bad libretti. However, it is hard to think of any first-rate *comic* operas which lack good libretti. And of the

very few comic operas in the repertory, five were written by our three pairs of equals – *Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, *Così*, *Falstaff*, *Rosenkavalier* – which leaves little more than *The Barber of Seville*, *Don Pasquale* and perhaps *The Bartered Bride*.

It is, I suggest, the great quality of a collaboration between equals to produce unity of mood. And unity of mood is the one thing without which no comedy can succeed. How astonishingly Mozart and da Ponte did it – above all in *Don Giovanni*, which is held together, finally, in spite of its chaotic dramatic construction, by no other thing.

It is this lack from which *Albert Herring* suffers and from which its original *Le Rosier de Madame Husson* conspicuously did not. The opera starts with as brilliant a first scene as anyone could wish, good musically, verbally, pictorially, perfect in shape and weight, and, what is more, laying down a quite clear and delightful level of comedy-farce at which we are to enjoy our evening. But this level is not maintained, though we are back at it in Act II while the function and feast are on. Nancy and Sid belong to another convention (or mood) and, more awkward still, Albert himself does too. This dichotomy between the characters gets quite out of hand in Act II, Sc. 2, where the soliloquy in the dark shop begins to remind one of Grimes in his hut, music and all. The opera never recovers from this failure to maintain a mood. Not that plenty of variety is illegitimate – look at *Così* and how even so straightforwardly lovely an aria as the second Fiordiligi moves by its sheer beauty without ever calling on one to believe suddenly that Fiordiligi herself is someone quite alien to the figure of comedy she has been until then. Or look at the girls' first duet – the absolute perfection with which the beauty and the mood are matched. Or look last at Elvira whom we must not pity too much lest the mood be broken. How lovely are her arias, but in how florid a style, musically and poetically! We pity her just enough. The standard of quality for the music of comic operas has been set by Mozart once and for all. He wrote

music which was first-rate as music while fully expressing the various feelings and meanings which comedy or farce required. And da Ponte did the same for the libretto. Boito and Verdi, Hofmannsthal and Strauss have carried on that tradition with success.

(Incidentally, the actual formula of recitative, aria and action ensemble which Mozart and da Ponte used is still perfectly valid; and not least for not having been effectively used for a very long time. That formula appears to provide a most suitable convention within which to produce the whole diversity of illusions necessary to comic opera.)

Now the order of events with an opera will be, presumably, idea, synopsis, libretto, music. The idea may well spring from either composer or librettist. It might even come from a third party – ideally, perhaps, in the form of a commission. (What might not have happened in the world of opera if it had ever possessed a Diaghilev?) This is the stage when all is fluid, when every possibility may be explored and every idea exchanged, until what the opera is to be – its shape and its mood – is clear enough to both collaborators for a synopsis to be feasible.

It is surely the librettist who should prepare the synopsis (in consultation, of course, with the composer): for the synopsis, though it will be the occasion for the music, is, when actually drawn up, a blueprint for a stage performance. There is no blinking the fact that an opera is a stage-play, though expressed in music as well as in words. It has to be seen and heard, too – the words as well as the music – and the action understood and accepted without disbelief. It is the words which distinguish it from ‘pure’ music and the action from oratorio. An opera with only *musical* shape and mood is not a complete opera; and a composer left to present a complete opera without a good librettist is under a handicap so severe that no composer has ever fully overcome it. What the librettist has to provide is the dramatic shape and the words and actions by which that is expressed. He will do this in sympathy and in consultation with the composer,

so that the dramatic and musical contributions may in the final opera be truly fused, but he must do this as an equal, not a stooge, and be prepared to insist if need be on matters which appertain to his share of the responsibility. But he must not only *act* as an equal – he must *be* one – as good a man at his trade as the composer is at his.

When the synopsis is finally agreed, then surely the shape that the opera will have, both dramatically and musically, ought to be settled. It is as if a painter had finally chosen the size and shape of his canvas for a particular picture and laid his picture out for it. At this point he knows exactly how each feature of it will lie on the canvas, the relation of the forms, where there will be light and where shade, what colours he will use and where. He has, in fact, his picture in his mind's eye and all he has to do is paint it. This leaves him free to concentrate on detail, on the carrying out of his plan. But it will be fatal if in painting it he makes any substantial alteration in his plan as it affects the proportions involved (all of which are inevitably related to the size and shape of the canvas).

I suggest then that a completed and agreed synopsis is essential and should be regarded as setting the shape in considerable detail for musician no less than for librettist. And the next step is normally all the librettist's – he must write the libretto, which the musician will afterwards set. (The synopsis will have dealt with such matters as the length of episodes and speeds).

Here one cannot help pausing to wonder whether, in a certain type of opera, it would not be advantageous if the words could be written to the music and not the other way round. It seems possible that a composer who conceives an opera as a symphonic whole might do better if he were not circumscribed by a detailed verbal network, though an agreed and carefully timed synopsis and stage directions would be essential. It would leave the musician entirely free and should not present a good librettist with insuperable difficulties. Or the idea might be applied to certain

passages only – say a scene which is in effect an expression of certain sentiments, perhaps a soliloquy. It would be interesting to have a composer's view on the point.

So the librettist sits and sucks his pencil. And, after all, well he may, for he needs quite substantial qualifications – all the equipment of a straight dramatist, to start with, and the knowledge and skill to adapt that equipment to the conditions. Power to create character, to devise and maintain plot and incident, to build tension, to create atmosphere, to write significant and memorable words – these things he needs no less because it is an opera. The means he uses to create and establish character must be governed by the fact that the composer will want to contribute his share of the characterizations. The plot and incident must be effective and credible at the pace of opera, the tension and atmosphere must woo the support the music will bring, must often be obtained by simply choosing words that can be sung to the kind of music he knows he must expect, the words throughout must be really singable at the pace agreed and must inspire the composer to accept the climaxes, the ups and the downs, that seem dramatically right to the librettist.

Knowledge and skill – yes indeed. Much technical knowledge of music is wanted for a start, if only because how else is a librettist to know just where the frontier between his territory and the musician's properly lies?

Given a librettist who knows enough about the musical side, it would seem to lie further into the territory usually left to the musician than might be thought, though this would be modified if the composer had a greater knowledge of the stage side than most of them have. What goes on on the stage must be far more than an illustration of the music; nor is the music a mere illustration to a play. An opera is an integration of musical and dramatic contributions. Yet what is *seen* and the words heard on the stage are what the librettist contributes: and he does his work first, because the composer cannot, it seems, do his part until the librettist has given him what he is to inform with his music.

So it looks wise to say once again that an opera ought to be the result of a collaboration of equals, each equally competent in his own sphere and each comprehending what the other's contribution is ; and of course with give and take as necessary, but always with maintenance of dramatic shape in terms of words, actions and music on the stage. Inequalities between collaborators may, if not too large, be rectified by one side's exceptional knowledge of the other's job ; but this can go only a certain way. Assuming that Boito's libretti for others were as good as those he did for Verdi, still those operas failed.

Albert Herring bears marks of a composer having his way against the dramatic grain. Act I, Sc. 2, slackens at once the splendid attention that Sc. 1 has called up from the audience. It takes too long to set the scene of Albert's labours (and this is not helped by the change of mood) and the incident of the scene seems often dramatically insignificant. The anti-climax after Albert's exit in Act II, Sc. 2, when Ma returns, again seems to have a purely musical reason which should not have prevailed. And here and there all through (except in Act I, Sc. 1 and at the feast) 'extra words' obtrude themselves – Strauss's *longueurs*.

Words *do* matter in opera, though the emphasis on their various functions differs from passage to passage. There is, as it were, a duet going on between librettist and composer ; and here one and there the other will principally take the ear, but always with the other's support. To take the extremes, in big contemplative arias – in all the high moments of the singing – the words will be second. But they *must* second, by vowel and consonant arrangement, by the mood of their meaning (which so hugely helps the singers) and by their invitation to the composer. In recitative and in all places where the turn of plot and incident must be made clear to the audience, words must take the lead and, while retaining the qualities mentioned in more or less measure, play the senior partner. In other places, such as action ensembles, words and music are equals. So the duet will make

its effect, just as a sonata for violin and piano does, if properly written and played as a duet and not as a violin solo with piano accompaniment.

Words for singing should be simple, but they ought not to be banal: clichés are indefensible. There is, also, oversimplicity – words-of-one-syllable writing, as it were. What is wanted is surely the simplicity of the Bible, not the childishness of the nursery rhyme. Recondite words will not get home, except in comic passages where the joke has been carefully prepared. (Preparing and ‘laying’ jokes requires as much skill in opera as in a straight comedy.)

Rhyme helps. When the audience knows a rhyme is coming, its range of anticipation must be to some extent and quite unconsciously limited sharply to the comparatively few possible words; so if when the word comes it is an unexpected one (but comprehensible) the score is doubled. Rhyme enables recitative to go quicker and be more easily picked up. The composer need not pause on the rhymes but set sentences, leaving the rhyme to do its own work of giving spring and shape and movement and so helping the singers.

One last point about words – their special help in setting a mood, in comedy in particular. Comedy is nearer than any other sort of opera to everyday life and its feelings: and words, rather than music, are the currency of everyday life for the audience. Words in comedy have, therefore, perhaps a more prominent function than they need have in opera of other sorts.

There remains the problem of congruous speech and here the libretti of Britten’s three operas may help us. All three have period settings – *Lucretia* following tradition (though a *Lucretia* in modern dress might be an interesting experiment), *Grimes* no doubt because the story chosen was written originally in the period portrayed. *Herring*, based on a nineteenth-century story, has been moved to the early twentieth and to England. It might well have been moved even further forward, a gain in wit and humour

from a more modern idiom in the words offsetting the perhaps cheaper and easier humour of Edwardian detail and costume. There is no reason why a modern setting need imply 'verismo', which is out of fashion, I know. Yet Puccini's exploitation of it quite obviously has not exhausted its possibilities, any more than Pinero or Galsworthy exhausted the possibilities of a contemporary play. *The Family Reunion* proved that poetic quality and a verse medium could thrive in a contemporary setting. It could in opera, too; and librettists might well find such a setting a help in this their most difficult of problems. Surely *all* good speech is contemporary in any work – Shakespeare wrote for Antony, for Romeo and for Macbeth in Elizabethan idiom alike (but not in the unpoetic terms of 'verismo'); and so, for that matter, do Duncan and Slater: incongruities are apt to be due to the period setting. In Shakespeare we no longer notice them much, since both periods are so remote from us now.

Grimes and *Herring* each present an atmosphere of the common people, with some intrusions from the middle-class. *Lucretia* moves in an atmosphere almost of mythology, though its protagonists are aristocrats and the setting one of taste and wealth. The problem of congruous speech is affected accordingly for each opera.

In *Grimes* the problems of language as a whole have not, I think, been fully solved. The minor characters apart, the problem is to convey the full and poetic meaning without destroying belief. A librettist may have more freedom in this than a dramatist would, because the element of singing sets his characters at a remove of one further admitted convention from realism. One need not ask for dialect, though Hardy has shown how magnificently that can be used to this end. But Slater goes too far, especially with Peter. The Pleiades, the horoscope – all that lyric seems to be out of language-character. Yet the hut scene is excellently done and never crosses the border; so is Peter's protest in court.

Peter telling his story to Balstrode gets involved in language too 'educated' for this simple story; the same seems to be so elsewhere in this scene, e.g. 'By the forgiveness of a casual glance.' And this *sort* of phrase is not good singing language – it is not simple enough in expression to be put over by the singer. There are other examples, e.g. the chorus lines beginning

'For us sea-dwellers, this sea-birth can be ...' etc.

On the other hand, the chorus 'Now is gossip put on trial' is first-rate; simple and menacing and just the thing to inspire the music it did inspire. The last chorus of all is equally admirable in a different style.

Lucretia is not so successful as *Grimes*, but then a much more difficult task was attempted. No fresh story to tell, but a well-known legend to present: one, too, of which famous versions exist and are familiar: no chorus to use for contrast, no effectual scenic help, no element such as sea to bring in. Duncan was compelled to rely on sheer poetic quality to a far greater extent than Slater. He has on the whole done this with success. As poetry, *Lucretia* reads better than *Grimes* – it reads as a poem, where *Grimes* reads as a libretto for music.

This is not necessarily good or bad, if the poetry is good for singing; sometimes it is, sometimes not. The ride to Rome is – and interesting to compare with the 'sea-dwellers' passage quoted from *Grimes* above: while the images are unexpected and even far-fetched they are quite easily taken in at first hearing – perhaps because they are concrete and the syntax is simple. But such lines as those given to the characters 'off' at the start of Act II seem out of key (especially Bianca's) and ill to sing. And there is the actual opening of Act II by the Female Chorus where one feels that the poet has misconceived as dramatist even more than as writer of words for music.

It is hardly the librettist's fault that the composer, hungry for opportunities for ensemble that the chosen structure

stints him of, unluckily chooses to elaborate such banal phrases (passing notes, as it were, in the poetry) as 'Good night' and 'Oh! what a lovely day.'

The inconsistent moods of *Herring* have made the difficult task of finding congruous, amusing and singable speech for a comedy more difficult still. Flatness and over-simplicity haunt us. But it is notable how much better the words run in the two scenes which do strike the right mood – the first scene of all and the feast.

The next year or two will present to us new libretti by, it seems, some names of literary note. They will be read and criticized freely and at length. So this is a good place to say how much easier it is to read a libretto by itself than the full score of which it is a component. What we shall really have to judge is the opera, when we have seen and heard it on the stage often enough to have appreciated it fully.